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THE WIFE'S EVIDENCE.

12030

A Novel.

BY W. G. WILLS,

AUTHOR OF

"NOTICE TO QUIT," "LIFE'S FORESHADOWINGS,"

&c., &c.

NEW YORK:

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,

FRANKLIN SQUARE.

1864.

TO

A DEAR AND TRIED FRIEND,

LOFTUS BUSHE FOX,

This Work is Dedicated

BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

IT shall be lawful for the court to summon before it the wife of any bankrupt, and to examine her after she shall have made the declaration to speak the truth, etc.—12 & 13 Vict., c. 106, § 1.

A wife is not competent or compellable to give evidence FOR or against her husband in ANY CRIMINAL PROCEEDING.—*Rule of Common Law.*

THE WIFE'S EVIDENCE.

CHAPTER I.

He sought to tell her these many days. On yesterday, when he returned from his office in Fleet Street to his house in Hornsey Road, he laid a plot to tell her; but, as he came languidly up stairs, his throat adust with the heat of a London midsummer, and saw her bright welcome awaiting him on the landing, he lost heart, and bethought him it was a pity to lose that garnishing of smiles to his dinner and their light to the restful evening. Last night he was on the brink of a disclosure, as they lay waking and talking, but the announcement still faltered on his lips. He was a man on the verge of bankruptcy, and his wife must be made aware of his position somehow. He was obviously the proper one to tell her, but still he held back the blow with a half-selfish mercy. The relative position and motive of this man toward his wife might have afforded to him some field for dramatic effect; there were various ways of announcing the tale of ruin which might have secured for it both dignity and pathos. If Mr. Coleman, insolvent, had consulted the pages of any popular novel which has appeared these ten years, he would have seen that his precise difficulty is a favorite staple with tale-wrights like me, and is capable of many effective solutions. He might have taken this wife of his by the hands, for instance, gazed at her long and silently, and then, with the true sepulchral thrill, made the announcement "Fulvia's dead!" Such moments have a grandeur which gratifies the vanity of sorrow. Or, again, with some little prelude of levity—with a certain abrupt fantasy of manner, and a playful allusion to the workhouse—he might take her unawares, and at the stirring moment catch the poor frightened woman to his bosom, and defy the world to *part them in riches* or in ruin. *But Coleman loved* not a scene, and had no gift for melodramatics. He was patiently oppressed with his dull secret during office-hours, while plodding through his daily toil; from the first bleak waking moments till the hour of release from his desk, he fretted pretty steadily, and then he came home for relief and rest, and cherished any temporary illusion of peace. When the evil time should have arrived, which must be near, he felt there would be leisure enough to teach her all the story of it, sitting at home with her the long autumn days, with nothing else to do but talk. Meanwhile he made the most of home, and gave his tongue a careless genial scope; he had a quiet Mercutio vein about him, which asserted itself at home and played most irreverently over the "sea of troubles;" he seemed to look at things whimsically there, and to trifle with his cares, never talking for an audience, but as it pleased himself and his gentle wife Nell. He chaffed her, and chatted with her, and brought her all the news of the town *except his own*. Of course he was sometimes a little abstracted, and at times gave way to a momentary irritation toward his thoughtless child or a stupid servant. Of course he now and then answered Nellie astray; he began to contract, moreover, a queer habit of looking in Nellie's face while addressing others, so that strangers might have supposed he was speaking to her.

Of late, also, whenever he heard a double knock at the door announcing visitors, he would invariably escape into his little library, leaving his wife to entertain their acquaintance, and show off her little boy to them in his bare legs and belted tunic.

These latter symptoms of his state of mind, appearing in a sociable man who had mixed in the world and possessed cool English nerves, were, perhaps, when subjected to a very loving scrutiny, serious enough.

But we have now the clew to such slight singularities which occasionally varied a very commonplace domestic serenity. The man was in trouble, and he sought from day to day for an opportunity to tell his wife, till at last *she* told him.

They sat below in the front parlor after tea. Johnnie, the young bankrupt, aged seven years, had toddled up to bed these three hours; his last play had been an auction, and articles for sale were still strewn about among the chairs: he seemed to have sold out all his stock — speckled horse and wagon, dolls, half-nibbled cakes and garden-tools, paying himself liberally with white pebbles gathered on the Strand at Brighton. His sparry wealth was now stored beneath his pillow, and he was peacefully asleep up stairs, but father and mother sat below, chatting, planning, musing, and even dozing between times, like other loving Darbys and Joans. Father was stretched lordly on his most comfortable arm-chair, and mother lay cozily up against him, her head upon his shoulder. There was no light in the room but the rank gas-light from the street lamp, which flared over them and threw a gulf of shadow behind them.

"I have had a dream, Will," she said, lifting up her head slightly from its pillow.

"Take it as an omen that we are going to bed, Nellie; I have observed for the last hour, my love, we have both been growing very drowsy and disagreeable."

"Wait a while; it's not twelve yet, Will. I have had such a dream, just now, on your shoulder."

He had been whistling pertinaciously some little air his wife had chanced to run over on the piano that morning. It had haunted him unconsciously over his ledger all day, and rested unwittingly on his ear all the evening, so that it began to worry his audience at last. It was born a merry tune, but he set it to such a melancholy drimmedhu whistle, it might have been christened the "Gazette March." It failed and died out in the midst, that he might hear this dream.

"I thought we were going up a hill in the City—Ludgate Hill, I suppose," said his wife, "and we got so jostled, and were so wretched. Johnnie ran before, and I came after; and my poor Will," said she, hugging him — "my poor Will came laggedly-last, so weary and footsore, so dusty and pale, when suddenly we found ourselves at the top, and there was old breezy Somersetshire—meadows, and groves, and hills spreading right before us, and your mother so stout and kind was there to welcome us, and you showed me over the old home as you promised. Dear! what a pleasant life! I had you to myself all the day. Johnnie grew so rosy, and I grew so fat and saucy. How I hope my dream will come true!"

"Why, Nell," said Mr. Coleman, with an uneasy smile, "you will soon be as great a seer as my old mother; if her strawberry cow dies to-day, she remembers for the first time to have dreamt yesterday about cold beef at dinner. Come, Nell, don't you turn out an impostor; I can't stand to be put upon by both mother and wife."

"I was only in play, Will. I had no such dream. You have surely got to tell me that the journal is failing, or has failed."

"How did you find that out, Nell?" said he in haste; "who told you so?"

"It was only a guess, love; but *you* ought to have told me long ago. I am not sorry, Will."

"Why, the paper is well enough, Nell, and beginning to pay, but I can't work it without capital, and creditors won't wait. My editor, and clerks, and writers, and paper merchants, and advertisement agents, and printers, are eating me up, and I suppose I must sell the paper."

"The sooner the better; it is but keeping you out of better chances," she said, brightly.

"The fact is, Nell," he replied, turning out to her on the impulse all his most jealous and innermost cares, "there are difficulties in the way of a satisfactory wind up. I have been plagued a good deal about my books: there is an unpleasant tangle in them which alarms me—you know what I mean. It is a very stormy prospect for us, my dear girl, and I can not tell how it will be with you and me in another month."

"I will tell you," she said: "in another month you and I shall be with your mother in Somersetshire, where

we shall have time to rest and plan, and before winter we will persuade my trustees to let us draw my money, and you shall start afresh in some better scheme than a dreary class newspaper. As for your books, bring them over here to-morrow, and I will help you to write up, as you call it, only teach me how. Let us put the trouble over us, Will, as soon as we can." She paused for a few moments to see if he had more to tell; she expected a reaction from his long secrecy, and that he would now relieve his heart by full and free debate. But he seemed satisfied, and disposed to let the matter sleep again.

"Shall you find it hard to tell your creditors, dear?" she inquired at last.

"Why, no, they are likely to be pretty insolent, and that will save me a good deal of pain; besides, it is suicidal to themselves, pressing me at such a time, so they half deserve their loss. I feel squeamish enough about telling Soames, the printer, because any loss knocks the little man off his perch, and he whines so piteously; but there is bully Trestle, the paper merchant, he will storm, and insult, and take out his change in impertinence, so I can not be very penitent with him; there again is an unfortunate bill which Simmonds, the advertisement agent, joined me in, and I fear he must take it up: this gives me a twinge, if indeed I can single out any special nerve when all my teeth are aching. But out of comparison, the hardest of all to break this news to was that little vixen Nell."

"Then the worst is safely over," said Eleanor, laughing, "and I hope they won't treat you worse than I do."

So the tragedy business passed by them, and Coleman felt his heart growing light. She had taken him by surprise. She had turned his flank with her ambushed sunshine, and while he wavered and doubted how to comfort her under the intelligence, her heart had read his secret, and she had applied herself to comfort him. She knew more of her husband's business, and of his nature and thoughts, than most wives, being of that meddlesome, jealously-loving temper of Brutus's wife, who thought herself as meet company for her husband's *mind* as for his body, *and presumed to couple* herself with him in his secret and most intimate cares.

William Coleman was a man of about five-and-thirty, an age when the powerful emotions and reactions of youth are disappearing, and the mind has got some of the mellowness of time without its decay. With the rational buoyancy of middle age, he was already beginning to look somewhat philosophically upon past and approaching cares. What is the world to a man if, with a loving wife nestling close to him, and a fair young son and heir up stairs silent and asleep—out of the way in the nursery—he can not have his little joke and quip at sorrow, and a playful jibe in the evening at men whom in the morning he thought worthy of a hearty curse?

In person Coleman was a broad-shouldered man, whose face was cast in a strong and handsome mould, plenty of bone in the temple, the nose, and the chin, but there was no severity there—mildly strong were mouth and brow, and there played over this strength a wavering light of homely humor. He told a dinner-table story well, I remember, save that at times he was too deliberate and long-winded for the gladiatorial talkers of third-rate literary society. To wit he had no pretension, but if you liked him, and would allow yourself to be pleased by a plain business man, who was also a gentleman, I think he could make the evening go by you, and set you talking too.

But how shall I describe her so as to convey the very breathing conception of the woman?

For expression her face labors under the disadvantage of great prettiness, which, being obedient to narrow rules of symmetry, generally lacks play and vitality of line. However, let me say there was a soft laugh in her eye when she smiled, caused by its closing lids: it was not a large eye, but it was set in shadow, and blue as a far hill-side. The eyebrows were straight and fine, her silky black hair grew low on the forehead, and was braided back to the ear. Her nose was—no matter what. We seem to lose the essence in this inventory. The woman had a specialty which singled her out from a host, and threw a witchery about her in the eyes of those she loved, or who loved her. Most women have some special attri

bute, which, when they are absent from us a sufficient time to obscure detail, remains upon the memory and serves to classify them. There are scolds, spies, tyrants; there are censors, peacemakers, lovers, and haters; but Eleanor was a comforter. A comforter *nascitur non fit;* and I think the trick of comforting is like to die with her. Now your comforter is a rare bird, in comparison with which a black swan is as common as a city sparrow. She must be purely unselfish and long-suffering to tedious repetition or tetchy inconsistency; she must have a nice tact to observe when despondent views are only assumed, that they may be c[illegible] bated by her ingenuity, and when [illegible] cause of depression must be admi[illegible] with candor, and yet be softened [illegible] circumstances hitherto unobserved [illegible] concealed. There are some who as[illegible] to be able comforters, yet are irrita[illegible] and reproachful if their council be not obeyed: let such be warily avoided by poor stricken souls. True comfort is as pliable and as mercurial in its shifting and shapes as Proteus. It adapts itself insensibly, but never bullies or overmasters. It is cheerful, no depressing pity or lowering condolence, no demonstrative affection, which, like [illegible] bed of down, is often relaxing and op[illegible] pressive.

It is a gentle special pleader that lo[illegible] ingly screens the ugly truth. It is li[illegible] the white plume on the hearse, whi[illegible] mutely, yet eloquently, contends again[illegible] the heavy sable around.

But in Eleanor it amounted to a g[illegible] tle divination, for her husband g[illegible] way to neither petulance nor impatie[illegible] with her, and the weather-index of [illegible] spirits, so to speak, gave but the slig[illegible] est hints, which no less jealously-loving wife could have observed. He was, as we have seen, undemonstrative, concealing his distress beneath a masculine reserve. It is easy unrefined work, and possible to the poorest female capacity, the ministering to selfishness and turning away wrath.

But, like the instinct of the thoroughbred pointer in roding the distant bird, Eleanor marked the latent grief by some delicate sense beyond mere sight; she *knew its shadow afar* off, and worked *and wound into it with* a loving assidu*ty, still suggesting,* without apparent reference to the trouble, some palliating circumstances, turning the trouble artfully round till on some facet the light would chance to glitter, cunningly guiding away the mind and thoughts into pleasant lines, and when at length she had created a happy mood, watching that it should not fail, like a child watching a rainbow bubble it has blown.

CHAPTER II.

For some days one or two of Mr. Coleman's creditors had become very importunate, and, in fact, almost driven him to bay. One of them, a deep-[illegible] d inveterate hound, Trestle, the [illegible] nerchant, had begun to hang [illegible] is flanks beyond patient suffer- [illegible] It is an uneasy and a galling [illegible] hich sometimes drives the poor [illegible] en to pant for bankruptcy as a [illegible] ctuary. Trestle was a man of mo[illegible] inous shoulder; he had a shock of sandy hair, a massive underhung chin, and a look of frustrated fierceness from having no eyebrows. There was, besides, dapper Mr. Simmonds, the advertisement agent, who had accepted a bill for Coleman's accommodation, and now began to quake as the day of [illegible] urity drew near; there was Soames, [illegible] nter, a nervous puny man, who [illegible] oss so piteously, and was always [illegible] ling one. There were, besides, [illegible] rs A, and B, and C, not needing [illegible] xplicit mention, but all sending [illegible] accounts and getting watchful. [illegible] Mr. Coleman determined to call [illegible] l together, and disclose to them [illegible] e of his affairs.

[illegible] ent circulars round to them, and [illegible] pointed a private meeting, and on the [illegible] day named they met him in a room engaged in * * * Hotel. He entered the room with some dignity and social position; he left it that day with the toga torn from his shoulders, and at the beck and bidding of any tomfool to whom he owed money.

A man flayed alive was a favorite subject for old Spagnoletti's pencil, and was found to be popular. The same process (metaphorically speaking) practised upon a poor insolvent on a raging July day and in a close room, by angry and oleaginous creditors, does not seem to me to promise much gratification, so I shall be as brief as may be.

"Gentlemen," said the insolvent, "this is the best offer I can make you in my present circumstances. If you will withdraw your pressure, permit me to collect my outstanding debts and work my paper, which is now beginning to pay, you shall have a dividend of 10*s.* in the pound within the year—that is to say, a dividend of 2*s.* 6*d.* in one month, and another dividend of 2*s.* 6*d.* in three months, and the two remaining dividends of 2*s.* 6*d.* in nine and twelve months. This is the utmost I can offer, but I hope the day may not be far distant when I shall be enabled to pay the balance in full."

"Where are your books, Mr. Coleman?" demanded Trestle, somewhat rudely.

"My books are not yet written up, Mr. Trestle. I have brought them, however, that those who please may examine them while this meeting lasts, and I shall lose no time in having them duly posted for your full examination."

"Why, I don't see what we have met for," growled Trestle, "if the books are not written up. You told me, Mr. Coleman, when I consented to give you long credit, that you had two thousand pounds capital. Do you want us to believe you've lost so much in so short a time?"

"The expenses of establishing a paper are enormous, Mr. Trestle, and I have had very heavy losses. My statement to you was correct, as you will see by my books."

"Ain't your paper beginning to pay?" cried Trestle.

"It is beginning to pay, but your ill-timed pressure has paralyzed me so that I can not work it as it deserves."

"Oh! very good; all right," cried Trestle; "let us look at the books."

Trestle opened the ledger and examined the account of trade expenses; from that, turning to the private account, he observed an entry under a recent date that excited his suspicion.

"Pray, Mr. Coleman, have you made a purchase of a house lately, that we find this entry of £1500 in your private account?"

"No, sir. I am sorry to say that money is lost."

"Lost!" murmured Trestle, with expanded chest; "then why ain't it in the *profit and loss account?*"

The insolvent made no reply.

Instead of pressing him, Trestle continued his investigation of the books. He had an iron headpiece for the disentanglement of figures, and he brought it to bear on Mr. Coleman's affairs. He had begun to smell treason, and as he threaded his way through the maze of entries, favored by chance he fell upon a close scent.

It happened that Mr. Simmonds, the advertisement agent, who stood at his elbow, had accepted a bill for a hundred pounds for Mr. Coleman, which would fall due in a few days, and a gentleman who is unexpectedly let in for the payment of an accommodation bill is naturally highly nettled. The man was noisy, and Trestle had endeavored to silence him, till of a sudden he nudged him significantly, and called his attention to an entry of £50 5*s.* 6*d.* which he appeared to have paid Coleman at a later date than the acceptance of the bill, and he asked him laughingly why he had paid his account after having accepted a bill in advance of it. Very emphatically, Mr. Simmonds asserted that he had done no such thing; some nine months before, indeed, he had made a payment to that amount.

"That will do," whispered Trestle; "we have him now; the books are cooked."

With redoubled attention he continued his investigation, though, it being now late in the afternoon, some of the creditors were growing impatient, and had proposed another meeting, with access to the books in the interim; but Trestle worked stanchly on from account to account, Simmonds hanging in couple over his shoulder, assisting him from time to time. His patience was rewarded by finding in various accounts a number of entries under the same date, and amounting in the aggregate to about £1500, which date corresponded with the unexplained debit in the private account.

Trestle's nostril inflated; he looked up in stern triumph; he kept his hairy finger upon the open page till a soiled impression of it was printed off.

"How comes it that Mr. Simmonds was not credited by you with this £50 until six months after it was paid?"

"It was omitted to be entered at the proper time," replied Coleman.

"Is it your habit to omit crediting your customers till any time you please? Here I find a number of credits on the same date; are these wrong too?"

"No doubt there are many irregular entries, which may have arisen from my having been obliged to correct some mistakes of my clerks."

"It's rather odd, gentlemen," cried Trestle, striking the book with his open palm; "these entries amount to about £1500."

Having delivered himself of this statement, Trestle rolled back his eyes on the insolvent, and stared at him like a bull-dog in leash; Soames stared at the insolvent with moon-eyed reproach; Simmonds, as he stared at him, was smitten with sudden hope that the bill was safe; creditors A, B, and C turned on insolvent with varied expressions of distrust or indignation; there were lifting of brows, and dropping of jaws, and murmurings of reproach.

"I put that money to my own private account, supposing myself to be solvent," said Coleman; "it is lost irretrievably, and now had we not better see what is to be done? Let me pay you as I proposed, and I think that the success of the paper will enable me ere long to pay you the remaining 10*s*."

"Before we entertain any offer from you," cried the creditors in chorus, "we must know what has become of this £1500."

"I'll tell you what I can do," persisted Coleman; "I can sell at once all my furniture and effects, which may produce an additional 2*s*. in the pound."

"Why, man," cried Trestle, forgetting due respect, "the moment you are unable to pay your creditors, every stick of property belongs to us morally and legally. What do you mean?"

"But I will offer you no vexatious delay, and will put you to no expense. If you press me farther, which I deprecate strongly at this time, I shall be forced to sell my paper, and thus destroy the means of ultimately paying yo[illegible] full."

[illegible]l this sounds well and smooth [illegible] a man who has cooked his books!" cried Trestle, with a burst. "I, for one, will take no composition or entertain *no offer until you place that £1500 in our hands, or show us how it was lost.*"

"*My proposal is at least worth considering,*" said Coleman, with determined evasion; "when my books are written up, of course you shall have free access to them; I believe there is no more to be said to-day."

So the meeting terminated; the creditors went away darkly in knots, talking in under tones; some threatened to strike a docket against insolvent forthwith; some proposed to call another meeting, and once more examine the books for a clew; some were for so far accepting the offer of the immediate surrender of the furniture as to close with him in that particular, and to realize something at once; but all, to a man, were unfriendly and distrustful. Trestle clapped on his white hat with violence, and walked out arm-in-arm with the incensed advertisement agent.

But Coleman waited in the room till they were all gone. He had just gathered up his books and taken his hat with a heavy sigh, when the door opened, and entered to him little Soames, who glided nervously up to his side, looking round cautiously to see that the room was quite clear.

"Don't, Mr. Coleman, now don't," he whined; "I relied upon you: I have got three hawful bills, amounting to £500, to take up within the next two months: let me have my money in full from this you have secured to yourself, and I'll not blame you; it won't make much difference to you, but it will save me; and to the end of my days nobody shall know—to the end of my days I'll be grateful to you."

"Mr. Soames, I feel for you very keenly, but you are addressing me under a mistaken impression — an insulting impression, which I can not permit you to rest under. My statement was literally true, and I have made the utmost offer in my power."

"Don't, Mr. Coleman, now don't—I shall be as close as the grave—I shall help you through with the others."

"I owe it to the other creditors," said Coleman, sternly turning away, "to put an end to such a conference."

"I didn't expect this from you, Mr. Coleman," whined the little man: "it's seldom a printer gives large credit such as I have given to you, but I had the greatest dependence on you: this is the second time I've been hit by trusting a man as called himself a gentleman;

: hit a poor man with a large fam-
s time."
eman met his appeal in cold si-
a course which, if persisted in,
es even a beggar's pride, and sends
ffended away. But poor Soames
o pride. He stood there, his hat
id, piteously wiping his forehead
his large red handkerchief, and
ian left him at last just as the tears
to run down his wizened cheeks.

CHAPTER III.

: day's worry was not yet blown
– there was another thunder-clap
cloud. Coleman had just reach-
: own door, and had raised his
to the knocker, when a gig drove
man leaped from it on the pave-
and accosted him with friendli-
tempered by a certain reserve.
as a handsome, gentlemanly man,
florid good-nature on his cheek,
certain official wiliness of eye.
ian extended his hand to him,
he door being opened, showed
ito his little study that was upon
ound floor.
io was this visitor? The open-
onversation would certainly fur-
o clew either to his station or to
isiness. They spoke of theatres
oncerts, and Coleman congratu-
the gentleman upon the success
last week's concert, and his good
ie in securing that star of contral-
Madame C——, who was on the
f the * * * Theatre, but was lent
n this occasion by the obliging
to a valued friend. Thus was
sitor placed upon his own topics,
icouraged to expatiate upon them.
Mr. Drummond (such was his name)
needed to be pushed before he
enter upon them, and seemed to
compliments on polite sufferance.
a very sinister sign of a man's
ion toward you when you place
on his hobby and he refuses to

eman offered him a generous lunch,
ng the hungry hour of two, when
business men like to dine; but
ranger was not to be tempted—a
ominous sign: none but an anx-
imperious, and importunate dun
refuse an offer of cold lamb and
bottled ale at two o'clock. At every pause in the conversation, supported chiefly by Coleman, this visitor's eye still began to freeze and stiffen into business solemnity. At length said Coleman,

"You have brought some advertisements to be inserted, Mr. Drummond?"

"I wish 'twas nothing more, Mr. Coleman; my business is not so agreeable to-day."

"Oh, indeed! this is rather sharp work, Mr. Drummond," said Coleman, looking abstractedly at the wall; and that was all he said. From henceforth he let himself drift.

"You must acknowledge I have kept out of your way, Mr. Coleman, for a long time, and let this debt run on. We are indulgent at Somerset House so long as all looks safe, but, you know, advertisement duties ought properly to be paid every quarter."

"What does my debt amount to?" said Coleman, bringing him to the point with a haste which betrayed irritation.

Mr. Drummond took out some papers from his breast-pocket, and, while he turned them over, he spoke very apologetically.

"You see, Mr. Coleman, certain rumors have reached my employers that you have become very much involved, and I am obliged to look sharp, or I might lose my place. In point of fact, I've had a reprimand for being too slack and merciful."

"You have always been very friendly and considerate toward me, and I quite acknowledge it. I suppose my debt amounts to a pretty thing by this?"

"Three hundred pounds, two and ninepence," said Drummond, showing him the official demand.

"What time can you give me? I shall be able to pay you," said Coleman.

"Why, Mr. Coleman—as to time, though I am sure the money is safe, and I am confident you would not allow me to suffer for my civility to you—but as to time, my employers have got hold of you now, and we really can not put it off."

"Two days," said Coleman. "Is that too much to ask?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Drummond, eagerly; his florid cheeks began to

shine and glow. Coleman paused for a moment, and took a turn up and down the room; then he quietly confronted his visitor.

"You must know, Mr. Drummond, I have other creditors besides you: those rumors are quite correct, and originate from myself. Now government must be served first: we must give the lion its pick before the jackals can come upon me. Here is my furniture at your service—it will more than cover this debt: send an agent of yours here tomorrow, and have a couple of vans at the door by seven o'clock, and the same for three or four mornings, till you have gutted the house. I wish the work to be done early, to avoid any unpleasant observation. Have it sold at * * * Auction Rooms under your own eye."

Mr. Drummond held out his hand with a look of great and hearty relief, acceding to the proposal forthwith. From this moment he opened his heart and put his hobby through all its paces, telling of his concerts, and setting forth his influence with lessees. Moreover, he offered Mr. Coleman a couple of dress tickets to the Haymarket, which inopportune attention was civilly declined. Further, he partook of a hearty lunch, which was a most favorable sign.

Mr. Drummond was a Collector of Duties from Somerset House when that vexatious tax upon advertisements existed, and an exceedingly easy, obliging official he was. I can not say that he was open to bribes, but he found a certain influence and substantial advantage arising from his situation which he was wise enough to enjoy. Opportunely enough, so as to turn these advantages to account, Mr. Drummond was a musical connoisseur in a small way, a man of taste and speculative talents. He had ample range of gratuitous advertisement in all but the leading periodicals, and he used to hire a room, advertise to the welkin, and offer the public a very tolerable concert in grandiloquent terms. He had influence with the lessees of several theatres, for whom he did mysterious good turns; and, I state it as a positive fact, their stars used not unfrequently to be lent out to shine in Mr. Drummond's little galaxy *for a night. Whether this speculative habit was an accident or a special attribute of his tribe, in truth* I can not tell. We used to call him in slang the "government runner," and had the misfortune of his acquaintance in that antediluvian literary period seven years ago. It is an animal now passed away—extinct as the Pterodactyl. I dare say he may be found somewhere in a glass case, or suspended in spirits of wine. Inquire after him from the editor of any substantial journal, and he will plead complete ignorance of his existence at any time. "We always paid our duties quarterly," he will say, "and heard no more about it. But a poor struggling journal, keeping its laboring chin over water, and like the pig cutting its own throat as it swims, makes many a queer acquaintance in the course of its suffocation—visitors which only appear at the last moments hovering over the dying like carrion crows."

When his visitor was gone Coleman went up to his wife to prepare her for the progress of events. She was sitting in the drawing-room with her child, a pretty boy of about seven years old, and she no sooner looked on her husband than she rose in some uneasiness—he seemed so worn and wearied; but yet they met with smiles. Care was never borne with a tranquiller grace and seeming than by these two in their daily life.

"Well, Nellie, that dream of yours is coming out; here we are on the top of Ludgate Hill. I only hope we'll soon have a glimpse of Somersetshire."

He then told her all that had taken place, and the immediate necessity for selling the furniture.

"Well," she said, "it must have gone in a few weeks—why not go tomorrow?"

He commiserated with her half jestingly, half sadly, upon the break-up of her pretty little drawing-room, the satin-wood table, the crimson damask lounges and sofas, the set of chairs glistening with mother-of-pearl, the chess-table inlaid with choice woods, the beautiful cottage piano irradiate with crimson silk, and all the rest of it—a mistress's pride, the evidence of her taste and refining presence. Alas! a woman is very fond of her upholstery, and I suppose poor Nell loved it like other ladies; but she gave no sign of regret. She let all go in the way of business without a sigh. She only once

said a little plaintively, as if for an instant she forgot her self-restraint,

"Johnnie was born here—dear, dear, I have such pleasant associations with the house."

She had lost two younger children by water on the brain, but they had died in Brighton; all had gone smoothly with her in Hornsey House.

They marked with chalk those necessary articles which they should keep. The plate remained to them, being Eleanor's in her own right, and specified in the schedule to the settlement. They kept the necessary bedding, and a few plain chairs and tables, a couple of presses, etc. Little Johnnie followed them wonderingly through the house, and watched their proceedings with some vague suspicion of their meaning, for he wanted his father to put the chalk cross upon his piebald rocking-horse which stood in the hall, but he passed it by.

Of course it was necessary to call up the servants and give them their discharges. Eleanor managed this delicate matter graciously and skillfully. They were all very fond of her, and respectfully surmised all that she shrunk from confessing, namely, that her husband was broken, and could no longer afford to retain them. They were all paid a month's wages in advance, and obtained first-class discharges—advantages to which servants are alive, and they showed their gratitude. Butler, housemaid, groom, and cook, regardless of pride, mingled their functions and lost their distinction in one common zeal to assist their master and mistress in their emergency. They unscrewed beds, tied chairs into bristling clusters, lifted down heavy furniture, and piled all that was to be removed ready to hand in the hall and lower rooms. During the next three days that removal quietly and almost secretly took place, leaving the house a shell. Then the servants departed with professions of affection and gratitude, and, haply, with much more definite and comfortable prospects before them than either kind master or mistress.

When tidings reached the creditors of this spiriting away of property, wroth, I wot, was Trestle, dismayed was little Soames, frightened were every one; they all rose in a body like an angry swarm of bees, and consulted what was best to be done in the emergency. Old Trestle cracked the nut for them; he instantly served Coleman with a writ.

"Now, Nellie," said Coleman, a few hours after this little event, "you have dismissed all the servants, and I am going to dismiss my wife and child—that is just retribution. You and Johnnie must go to Taunton to your sister for a while, and she will be very glad to have you."

"You must not send me away from you at such a time, Will," she said, surprised.

He explained to her that he should be from home from morning till night for a week or so, and that it would be well, for both their sakes, that she and the child should be in comfortable quarters.

"But I am not so unselfish as you think, Nellie. When I begin to get yellow under the cheek-bones, and find myself growing grim about the mouth, I'll send for my little woman to cheer me up and rub some fairy ointment on my eyes. You never fear, Nell, you'll be back in good time."

She opposed him no farther, but gave a cheerful assent to his arrangement; and, as proof of the highest state of good discipline, she made such energetic preparations, that she was ready the next day to take her sister by surprise. This was not the last eventful time when she had to do the same, and no doubt it is a very convenient matter to have a married sister in the country whose house may be a place of shelter when the wind blows keen at home.

When Eleanor and the child were out of the way, Coleman applied himself to sell his paper. He had an efficient deputy, to whom he intrusted its daily issue while he was away endeavoring to effect a sale by cautious private negotiation and anonymous advertisement. He was not without bidders, for the paper was really beginning to pay, and might become a good thing yet; but these bidders knew his desperate circumstances, and were very coquettish, obstinately striving to beat him down. They pursued this little game so long, that he was presently obliged to suspend the sale and look to himself.

The eight days had expired after the writ, and he had let judgment go by default, having no defense to the action, and willing to save all unnecessary expense. Moreover, he had taken a resolution, for the following strong reasons, not to surrender his person. In the first place, he found time was needed to sell his paper to advantage; he saw no reason why he should undergo the scandal and exposure by arrest, when in a month or thereabouts he might hold enough money to offer a fair dividend, and, if necessary, pass the courts with credit.

When the hurry and occupation of business began to fail, and when he was obliged to think of a quiet home residence for a time, when his cheek was growing sallow and his voice harsh, and the mouth-corners grim with loneliness, he wrote for his wife, and she needed no second invitation.

She arrived late one evening sunburnt from the country, but fresh and healthy, with a superb bouquet of hothouse flowers, and a basket of fruit and a hamper of vegetables, all which she saw safely landed in the empty hall.

"Presents for Lady. Penhurst—all these, Will," she said, laughing.

Now my reader could make nothing of this saying, or even guess its depth or subtlety, without an interpreter. I am not aware that Coleman or his wife ever knew a peeress in all their lives; but Lady Penhurst was a grim old dowager who had a pet poodle, and who gave Eleanor rather a fright, the said Eleanor's little phaeton having driven over the dowager's poodle's fore leg. There were threats of a summons, and prosecution, and what not from the incensed dowager, till you could have put poor Nellie in a nutshell from alarm, and it was henceforth a mild joke of Coleman's whenever his wife was too long absent on a visit to her sister's and he was getting lonely, "Come home as soon as you can; Lady Penhurst is pining for you;" or "Lady Penhurst can't think what is keeping you;" or "Start at once; Lady Penhurst is tormenting me out of my life with affectionate billets about you every day." In this very letter which whistled her to his side so promptly, he informed her that "Lady Penhurst was confined to her room, and was about to have desperate recourse to colchicum and gout mixture for consolation if Eleanor did not immediately join her;" and Eleanor was up by the next train. It was a very mild joke, but a very loving one, I can assure you.

That night he explained to her the exact position of things, and the measure of risk which threatened him. The communication, perhaps, was one well calculated to shake a woman's nerves; but when she understood him she made no fuss, though it must be confessed the ugly word arrest was somewhat a bogie to her ear, and made her start, and her pretty hand tremble in his. When, however, he proceeded to tell her that, on due consideration of his duty to himself and his creditors, he thought the right course was to resist an arrest at present by prudently keeping the house for a week or so, she most emphatically agreed with him without a glance at the moral bearing of the question.

"You are going to be a second Jane of Flanders, and stand a siege in this our castle of Hennebonne," said he, gayly. "We shall make a little sortie every evening after sunset, walks by moonlight, starlight, and no light. At that hour we outlaws are privileged from arrest. But on Sunday morning we shall make a gallant sally and be out all day, ribands flying and flowers in our button-holes."

"Dear me," said Eleanor, with a bewildered smile. "How shall we manage about visitors?"

"We shall cut off our communications with them, Nell, by screwing off the knocker and breaking the bell-wire; bailiffs and morning visitors are enemies all the same."

"What will people say?" smiled Eleanor, still bewildered.

"Why, the gentlemen will say you have murdered me, and the ladies will sit in banco and say I have murdered you," said Coleman, smiling still, till he saw the mustering distress of her looks, and then he spoke seriously.

"Nellie, mind this. Not all the gossip of all the old women in town and city raised against us could so much as wither that flower in your breast. If they could make wax effigies of us, and stick pins in us by proxy, it would be very serious," he said, slipping into play-

fulness again; "and if we feel the slightest sensation of invisible pins and needles, why, we shall surrender and lay before them a full account of our affairs. Till then we won't torture ourselves with imagining what we neither see, hear, nor feel. Foolish rumors quickly find their level, Nellie, and in our case it won't be very difficult to arive at the sober truth. While there's novelty in making me out a knave, people will do it, and when they're tired of that they'll find it fresher and more clever to make me out an ill-used honest man."

"It may be just as well," Will, said she, with a forced smile, "to give up all our acquaintance, for it must come to it at last, and we shall have the pain over us at once if we give them up now."

"Don't trouble yourself, Nell, about giving them up—that is their business: they will give us up, and make no ceremony about it."

"When we come to think of it," said Eleanor, still forcing good cheer, "how few acquaintance we care to lose. By-and-by, Will, we may have to face a more serious matter hand in hand, and I seem to feel—don't you?—that this false position will exhaust people's horror before they hear of something else."

"Ay, ay," said Coleman. "You've often seen a retreating wave break the big wave coming on by its back swing; but my poor Nellie, though," he said, caressingly smoothing her hair—"my poor, poor Nellie, won't the pretty roses die out of her cheeks shut up here all day long? Mind you this, wifey—as to this disgrace, it can never touch you; all the people will pity you."

"They sha'n't wrong me of my share in the disgrace, Will."

"Well said, Nellie," he replied, quietly; "well said, well said; I knew your mettle well."

Eleanor could see that there was no time to be lost in taking the necessary steps to make their voluntary imprisonment as tolerable as circumstances allowed. She collected the best furniture that remained into the front drawing-room, which they selected as their sitting-room, and she pressed his strength to the task in carrying articles of weight. The services of an old charwoman she retained for the time they were likely to remain in Hornsey Road—a querulous old dame was this, who lived in a big bonnet like a snail in its shell. Coleman had christened her Tartar, and she answered to the name snappishly enough. Now Eleanor had selected her as the one on whom a slight and luxurious imprisonment would sit lightest of all. Old Tartar, living on a constant soakage of tea-leaves and rancid bread and butter, would suddenly find herself in a charwoman's paradise as queen of the kitchen, mistress of perquisites, a fine cat to keep her company, and meat dinners every day. Eleanor felt quite a sense of benevolence in offering her the place, and Tartar suffered herself to be hired with apparent content.

All these arrangements, then, having been completed, one night Coleman went down stairs, and, opening the hall door, deliberately wrung off the knocker; then, re-entering, he locked the door and put the chain on it, having called up old Tartar to see him perform the act. The old woman watched him with blank glassy eyes as he further proceeded to break the bell-wire in two with the stroke of a chisel.

"Do you know the meaning of all this, Tartar?" he said.

"No, I do not," said the old lady, blinking at him from under her perennial old bonnet, which she never took off while visible to mortals, and which, she having lost her hair, served as an economical wig. "No, I do not."

"It is done out of consideration to you, Tartar; you shall not be troubled at your time of life hobbling up and down all day to open the door."

"Thank'ee, sir; I'll want to go out myself now and then in the day, and I'll keep the key, if you please."

"If I catch you opening this door, Tartar, on any pretense whatsoever, I'll put you under the shower-bath up stairs, and give you a proper drench that will keep you by the kitchen bars for a while; so take off your bonnet and give up larking at your age."

"The idear!" said old Tartar. "Then I suppose I may go out of the back door when I please?"

"I'm just going down to lock the back door too, Tartar; if you wish I shall lock you out, and then all the dripping goes to me and Mrs. Coleman."

He went down, followed by th

grumbling crone, from whose suppressed indignation escaped many little ejaculations, such as "Lor, I like this," and "Here's treatment for a decent body—the idear!"

"Now, then, Tartar," said Coleman good-humoredly, "I dare say you know when you are comfortable; but, if you have any objection to remain with us, there's the back door open, and you may go home."

The old woman looked around her: she beheld upon the dresser-shelf the white crocks of dripping; she surveyed the comfortable kitchen range, her little black teapot established on the hob; a fine piece of bacon appropriated to her use hung up on a ceiling hook; there was a fascinating mess upon the fire, upon which her hungry old heart was set; there was a snug glimpse of cook's bed from the room off the kitchen in which she was to sleep—she could not tear herself away.

"Lor, you take one very short, sir; I'd be sorry to leave your dear lady in her trouble; and, though it's not what I'm used to—"

"In short, Tartar, you'll stay." He locked the back door and put the key in his pocket. "I think you're right; every night I let you out for an hour to discuss with your friends the affairs of myself and your mistress."

"Lor, for shame on yourself, Mr. Coleman—I'm not that sort."

"And," said Coleman, "for fear you should puzzle your old head so as to injure your health, I shall tell you why I lock up the house. I am under heavy debts, Tartar, and liable to be arrested by a bailiff and sent to prison. Now you know what to tell old Nan, and Mrs. Broome, and the rest of them." So saying he departed, but the old dame fell to a sudden quaking at his words, and she shook the back door with palsied vehemence, after which demonstration she sat down by the kitchen fire, and many times shook her old bonnet at the red coals. Here she was locked up, in a conspiracy against the laws of the land—an old wife of seventy pitted against the bum bailiff: she let her mess boil over on the fire amid her reflections. Coleman and his wife sat in the front drawing-room, which was now bare boards, like a pictureless frame; the pretty Kidderminster was rolled up and gone, and yet the place was not without some rough comfort: there was the bedroom table in the middle of the room, and there were two hall chairs, doubtless enough for two people, and there was a small work-table for Eleanor; on the chimney-piece was the large hot-house bouquet Mrs. Coleman had brought from the country, magnificent camellias and geraniums; upon the mantle-piece, also, were two conspicuous objects which Coleman placed there, with which to conduct the siege—terrible weapons of offense adapted severally to himself and his wife—Eleanor's medicine-chest to wit, and beside it a villainous old blunderbuss which he had picked up in an auction lot; its lock was gone, and its barrel was burst two inches at the muzzle.

The weather was still bright and hot, so all the windows were thrown up, and the fragrance of the mignonette in the boxes entered on the gentle pants of air. From without, the house looked as habitable as before; the Venetian blinds were visible, and the delicate white muslin behind them; the sun shone bravely on the window-glass, and the mignonette boxes trimly frilled the sill with verdure; the red brick walls glowed through the jessamine, and the thin blue smoke from the kitchen chimney climbed into the still blue air straight as a palm-tree. But within—the house was a mere shell, an English homestead in a state of outlawry: there went unhomelike echoes through the house when one walked or talked in the rooms; and those rooms, did they not seem larger, more vaulty than before? There was a lifeless tranquillity through them; they were emptied of associations; they looked as if a child had never played through them for years. The sunshine fell in upon naked boards, and in that stern sunshine trembled the shadows of the mignonette, as in fear. The domestic cat, but the other day a fawning pet, went suddenly wild, not recognizing the bare walls as her home; she darted up the chimney when brought into the room, and lay there hiding in the flue till tamed by hunger.

Singularly incongruous to the place were the two inhabitants who sat in the drawing-room, silent and busy all day. Coleman had brought his books from the office, and he toiled over them

from morning to evening. Sometimes, leaden-eyed with headache, always yellow with overwork and care, murmuring up the weary monotonous files of figures, the money table in all its varieties commingled with the names of men. Ranged before him on the table lay the cash-book, the day-book, and the ledger, and still he bent from one to the other, comparing, writing up, unraveling the tangles of his clerks. Save for the presence of his pretty companion, you could have fancied him an exhausted auctioneer, totting up the catalogue of ruin his hammer had worked in that deserted home.

Eleanor generally sat by the open window, a summer form akin to the sunshine, and flowers, and butterflies without. She was always so prettily dressed, winter or summer—a dainty sprig muslin, as fresh and crisp as May blossoms or meadow-sweet; little marble-white wristbands and collar, and a white carnation or two fastened on her breast by a little silver brooch. Her rich black hair, rooted low on the forehead, swept back to her ears without a wave, and formed a placid frame to the face, so calm, and young, and matronly, with the lights and shadows of compassion flitting over it. What a home was this to poor Eleanor, in this strange time—all she had to conceal, all she had to counterfeit!

She had to conceal her nervousness. She would glance up the street and down the street, fearing lest she might see the tipstaff skulking in every arch, peering round every street corner. For a time she was in a high-strung excitement, which kept every sense secretly on the alert; but this fear lessened as she became accustomed to the situation, even as women grow brave in a besieged city, and can stand upon the walls at last. She had to conceal her weariness of spirit at the inordinate length of these days, so bright, and hot, and silent. Both of them were very patient, but she had most to bear. Her domestic duties had grown almost a sinecure. Where was her shopping, her visiting, her household cares for their daily meals? She used to write so many letters, and in an unambitious way she was accounted by her friends to be a delightful correspondent; but now, in the awkward state of their affairs, she shrank from communicating with any of their friends, not knowing what to tell them. There was a perfect dearth of domestic news: no record of Johnnie's health, or ailings, or wise sayings; no news about her acquaintance, for here she was cut off from them as if the house were plague-struck; there were no prospects, no plans to be discussed, and what she might have told them were best left in the dark till it could be hidden no longer. She sat by the window darning, sewing, or working some small piece of crochet, or, when tired of these, with her folded hands in her lap watching her husband's restless toil, and listening to the busy scratch of his pen, till at intervals she heard the sigh of weariness escape from him, and then she spoke to keep up his heart and her own. What she said was so homely I shame to set it down here, but I wish I could send a waft of her voice across the page: it was no ideal tone; it would be simply laughable to compare it to flutes, or lutes, or rivulets—musical is not quite the epithet which applies to it. Something in it bordered on the querulous key, but it was not querulous. You sometimes may catch the tone in the deep Somersetshire accent, never on the squeaking cockney lungs; for it was a low, playful, remonstrative, *genuine* voice, that could coax and banter, and, you fancied, could mourn.

During the first two or three days Eleanor was occasionally routed from her seat at the window by the arrival of visitors. A carriage, or a brougham, or ladies afoot would stop at the gate, whereupon Eleanor would jump up in some confusion, and retreat out of sight with a rustle of muslin, whispering who it was to her husband. How the visitors stared up at the window, and wondered and stared again; how liveried servants gaped when, approaching to knock, they found no knocker, and pulled a broken bell; what they all said and conjectured till they drove or walked away, Eleanor, with a beating heart and a tingling blush, never waited to observe. She was not indifferent to the tongues of the world, but she had to conceal her pain. The sudden forfeiture of her social position, and all the vague calumny which must follow, struck her with some dismay, notwith-

standing her husband's philosophical views: she would not have been a woman otherwise.

There was Mrs. Delapoole, so patronizing and critical, talking with such gentle kindness, while her eyes wandered in cold criticism over Eleanor's dress and round her room—what would the queenly Mrs. Delapoole say? There were the Droppers, a nice kind family—why, they'll think we are robbed and murdered, thought Eleanor; I doubt they'll be content to go away. And there's simple old Mrs. Bell, she'll think Will is a sort of highwayman, cooping himself up from the law. And dear, oh dear! there's the judge and his young wife whom we were beginning to like so much—they'll never look at us again. Well, let them all go, for Will's sake.

Soon, however, they were troubled no more with visitors, and the outside of the house began to look desolate enough to tell the tale. The garden around it had withered up in the heat; the flagger leaves of the pinks lay brown and ripped on the bed; the earth was gaping and crumbling; the leprous toads had climbed up from the little bordering drain to bask upon their wrinkled bellies, undisturbed by passing foot. Eleanor forgot her acquaintance in other thoughts: she used to catch herself listening for sounds from the nursery—her little boy's laugh, or the joyous drumming of his little feet. No; the nursery was death-still, while children would play on the road below, laughing and shouting cheerily, twitting her, as it were, with the absence of her own child. How she missed her child during the hour before breakfast, when she used to dress him! How she longed for him at her knee at the hour she used to teach him his two-syllable reading lessons! She had nobody to talk to through the long day, and all this depression stole over her by degrees.

Each afternoon she grew cheerful again during the evening meal with her husband, which was cooked by herself; and her heart grew light again at night when they took their long cool stroll down the road. It was a delicious *dewy hour, and* they walked right on *toward the dead sunset*, where lay the *long blue clouds fast* asleep.

At this hour, too, they did what shopping was required, and catered for the succeeding day, knocking at the private doors of the shopkeepers with whom they dealt.

All throughout their confinement this wonderful sunny weather lasted with scarcely a cloud, till toward the end of the second week, on a sultry Saturday, there was a change; there came a thunder-storm to clear the air. During the heaviest peals Coleman laid aside his task lest his wife might be alarmed, and he walked up and down with her, his handkerchief over her face, that she might not see the spangles of lightning which seemed in the very room with them.

On that night, too, they walked through the refreshed country, and watched the distant flashes dancing, and listened to the thunder like a far lion on their scent.

Upon the Sunday following, the long imprisoned pair walked forth in full daylight to church, as free as their neighbors. They were not much noticed in the stream of people either coming or going, but some of their visiting friends did see them, and by their manner seemed to have formed their own conclusion. The ladies cut Mr. Coleman dead, and bowed markedly to Eleanor; but she, observing the distinction, turned her eyes away with quiet indignation. She feared them no more.

An unexpected and half-comical source of annoyance opened upon Eleanor during her period of imprisonment, which we must not omit. The old charwoman, Tartar, whom Eleanor had relied upon as least likely to give trouble, began to mutiny. She had taken some crotchety notion that she would be rendered liable to arrest and condign punishment by this defiance of the laws of the land. Her alarm reached a climax, having observed one day the old blunderbuss upon the chimney-piece while dusting the room. That afternoon, while her master was in the thick of his work, and Eleanor at her vigil by the window, the door was softly pushed open, and the puckered old crone peeped in and beckoned her young mistress out of the room. Eleanor came to her and brought her into the back drawing-room, supposing that

she came to make some inquiry about dinner.

"Well, Mrs. Cann, what do you want?" she inquired.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, but I don't by no means understand the goings on in this 'ere house. I don't intend no disrespect, ma'am, but a poor lone body like me, as buried the last belonging to me twenty year ago, must mind not to get into other folks' trouble."

"Why, what trouble could you get into, Mrs. Cann?" asked Eleanor.

"Lor, ma'am, I han't lost my memory yet. There was Mr. Smith who shot the policeman, ma'am—bless your heart! he shut himself up just like the master here, with guns, and bagginets, and the like. Why, Lor love you, ma'am! the military and police came up to the door one night, and twisted it off its hinges wi' a crowbar, and up they ran to his room, and pulled him out from under the mattress wi' a pistol in both his hands, and knocked him on the head fearful. I wouldn't mind that, ma'am, but they handcuffed the whole house down to the little girl as cleaned the boots, they all being adders and betters in that 'ere murder."

"Oh, nonsense, you silly creature! Mr. Coleman has done no crime."

"I don't know that, ma'am — oh! I don't know that — a poor lone widder must be heedful. I don't know what he has done, and don't want to."

"You can leave us if you wish, Mrs. Cann, but you've taken a very silly notion. You see that your master and I go out every evening, and we shall go to Church on Sunday. Don't you know we would not go out if we were afraid of soldiers and police?"

"Bless you, ma'am! I don't know what a body dare. Why do you keep your door locked up and chained all day if you ain't been and done some felony? and what have you that 'ere orful blunderbussh upon the chimney-piece?"

"The blunderbuss—oh! that's what has frightened you," laughed Eleanor. "Why, it's an old broken thing that couldn't go off; come in and see it for yourself. Mr. Coleman brought it down here in jest, because it would fetch nothing at the auction."

She led the old woman into the front room, laughing.

"Will," she said, "here is old Mrs. Cann; she wants you to set her mind at rest. The poor woman thinks you have committed some dreadful crime, and that you are going to murder the police with that blunderbuss."

Coleman looked round at the old woman and bade her "good-morning" with mock gravity.

"For the sake of this dear lady, sir," said Mrs. Cann, "I'd be unwilling to leave you. I don't know what you have done, sir, but I ask you with all respect," she continued, looking dolefully at the weapon, "not to let a poor helpless old creetur like me be 'sponsible for such a crime as you knows on, and I don't ask nothin'."

"You have nothing to say to what I have done, Tartar, but I have no objection to confess to you that I keep that blunderbuss there in case any one dares to unlock the house door without my license. I'll discharge it right into that big bonnet of yours, Tartar — ay, as readily as I'd smoke a wasp's nest—if I ever catch you meddling with the keys."

"Oh, my heavens!" muttered the crone, clasping her hands.

"Never mind him, Mrs. Cann, he's only laughing at you. Will, she believes you, and the foolish woman will leave us. Tell her you were only in jest."

Poor Mrs. Cann was in such an aguish state of consternation that the process of comfort and reassurance was very slow and by no means effectual. Coleman had to point out to her the masses of cold damp rust on the barrel of the gun, and promised to have it locked up out of sight; and finally Eleanor promised her that in a week or so the house should be thrown open to the public, and that she should be left to take charge of the place until it was set again. After which solace she took the old woman down stairs, and left her over a good cup of tea.

When she rejoined her husband he was standing dolefully by the chimney-piece.

"Nell, my poor Nell!" he said, "I wish it was this day six months, and all our sea of troubles behind us."

"I suppose you've come to that sad place in the books, Will," she said, going to the window and bending over the mignonette.

"Ay, I'm beginning to founder at it, Nell."

"Don't spare me, Will," she murmured, bending over the flowers.

There was a few moments' silence, and then she said with energy, turning round toward him, "Whatever comes of it, Will, you must not be sacrificed."

"I don't know what's to be done, love. What would I give if we were just starting for my mother's—you, and sonny, and I—with all this sad work done and over!"

It was just the moment of despondency when the strongest will gives way; and she came quietly over to his side with a sprig or two of mignonette, making no fuss, and placed the flowers in his button-hole.

"Never mind, Will," she smiled. "We never had much care to bear together before; but I'll carry half of it, and you'll carry half: I'd carry the whole if I could," she whispered, with a kiss.

From this hour she sought to please him and divert him by little attentions, and she made cheerful talk for him, encouraging his homespun drollery. While on their night walks, she always gathered ferns and wild flowers to freshen up the stale bouquet on the chimney-piece, he was so fond of a bit of green about him. She made merry of their isolation and the friends fallen away, lest he might think she deplored their loss; but he didn't quite trust her in this.

"Why, I remember the time," he said, "when it took a convoy of six gentlemen to see my wife to the railway station at Taunton; and there's none to love and honor her now but an old bankrupt in his shirt-sleeves."

Coleman's work was feverish, and he sat at it without his coat.

One pleasant day, when the fleecy clouds had come at last, he had nearly completed his work; his back was less bent and his brow less creased over it, while Eleanor sat at the window planning how she might gratify him in the evening, and wishing that she could pay a visit to Covent Garden to buy him a fresh bouquet, when some kind fairy heard her prayer.

She was at the sentimental occupation of darning a heel on one of his hose, when there swam right under the window a flower-man in light fustian coat, brown gaiters, and broad country hat, his arms pregnant with two magnificent fuchsias in large pots, all the red bells quivering; he looked up at her seductively as he displayed his goods—such a beaming rustic look—such rosy cheeks and laughing blue eyes! The thought was instantly begotten in her heart, What a surprise and pleasure it would be to Will if she bought these beauties for him! She looked up the street and down the street to see if all the coast was clear, but there was not a soul in sight save some children at play; so she nodded to the man approvingly, and, rising, she laid her work quietly aside. She crossed the room softly and opened the door.

"Well, Nellie," said her husband, "where are you going, dear?"

"I'll be back in a moment—dinner must be near ready now," she said, employing an innocent prevarication that her gift might not lose its grace.

He turned to his ledger again, and she ran down stairs, crossed the hall quickly, unchained and unlocked the door, which she opened cautiously. There stood the jolly countryman, with his two arms full of perfume and beauty.

"Come in," she said. "How beautiful! What do you ask for the pair?"

"They are not for sale, ma'am," said the worthy man, stepping genially in and laying the two flower-pots on the rug; "they are not for sale, ma'am; but you can admire the posies and have a smell, while I do a little business with Mr. Coleman up stairs."

He passed her actively, and went up stairs with the footfall of a cat.

"Oh, come back!" cried poor Eleanor, "come back! where are you going? what have I done?"

He turned on the first flight, and bowed to her with mock courtesy, and pantomimed to her with his hand on his heart that he was obliged.

"Will," she cried, when she had recovered herself, following the man in great agitation, "take care, take care." But, before she could make herself heard, the bailiff—for so he was—had walked gently behind Coleman's chair as he sat lost over his figures, and, touching him on the shoulder lightly, told him he was wanted.

Coleman sprung to his feet and awoke

to his position just as his wife entered. He looked at her poor linen-white cheek, and from that to the rosy cheek of the triumphant bailiff, and he burst into a good-humored laugh.

"Come, Nellie," he said, "you've been imposed upon by this rascal; you are not cunning enough for a bailiff yet; but there's not much harm done." Then turning to the man, "Allow me a few words with this lady, my good fellow; stand on the stairs for a few moments and I will join you."

He gave the man some money, who respectfully retired.

Then most pitifully Eleanor told her tale amid a flood of abashed tears. "To think that it should have happened through *me!*" she sobbed; but still her husband only laughed.

"Why, Nell, it was your kindness did it, and I am only gratified; you shall see me every day. A sponging-house is a most aristocratic hotel, patronized by the nobility and gentry; I can not be there long, for my paper will be sure to be sold soon, and I shall be called up to the courts in a week or so. Mind you bring one of those fuchsias to me to-morrow for company, and we'll christen it Picciola."

He bantered her till he made her laugh through her tears, and then he made her write down the direction of the sponging-house, which the bailiff gave her, and then, embracing her, he went cheerfully away under arrest.

* * * * * *

Coleman was imprisoned in a well-known sponging-house in Fleet Street, and, considering the nature of the place, not uncomfortably lodged. Eleanor was with him every day, and, his books being written up now, he sat talking or reading, or strolling with her in the caged yard. Their inconveniences and privations seemed to sit lightly upon them. There was a disreputable arm-chair he had hired with other furniture, which used mysteriously to disappear for whole days, and then be replaced without explanation. He christened it the "Old Ticket of Leave." There was a little fire-eaten poker, eight inches long, known to him by no other name than the "Twelve-penny Nail." The turnkey happened to have but one eye, and *that was a pleasant*, kindly one. *Mr. Coleman rather flattered* him by addressing him as Polyphemus. This imprisonment, as far as surface appearance went, was quite a cheerful little episode. They read a deal and talked a deal, and she still directed his mind beyond their gathering troubles, and away from their repressed apprehension, amusing him with tales of country folk she used to know, their quarrels, their jealousies, and their loves, for she could be a very diverting little gossip, this Nellie, when she pleased; and while she sat there *indirectly* comforting him, the naked little chamber with its barred window grew strangely snug and homely. Coleman was not long in durance. When the time of his imprisonment amounted to an act of bankruptcy he applied for his release, and was called up to his examinations. His books were sent in by him to the assignees, and his assets placed in the hands of the registrar; his creditors opposed him to a man.

CHAPTER IV.

It has been my lot to sit hour after hour in that arena where the creditors —*inversâ pollice*—overrule the victim's fate. I know and have studied very feelingly the bankrupt demeanor and the bankrupt eye when he is tied to the stake and well bated. Fretful work, my masters, are these examinations either to the honest man or to the knave; they are the last agonies of a long term of torture, the *peine forte et dure* of breaking trade. That breaking up, and winding up, and calling up gives a look which I know when I meet; I think I could point out a man in the streets who is about to go through the courts, but I'd swear to that man all over the world who had passed. Just as a doctor detects the disease breeding in the human frame, so I can recognize that bleak look—the green pike light in the eye of the worried rogue—the vigilant melancholy brimming the eyes of the honest bankrupt. Alas! honest bankruptcy is an Avernus easy of descent, but from which few emerge. The honest man knows this; he knows his ruin has been accomplished not by dissipation or gambling, but by getting up early and going to bed late—by endless industry and sleepless zeal—only applied in som wrong direction, or shunted off the r

by some obstruction which no judgment could have foreseen. He dreams and drowses on hopelessly; thinks of lost chances which rogues were free to accept, but which his sense of right forbade; of assets the rogue would have concealed with perfect security, but which an honest conscience in business compelled him to surrender; and he feels a lack of that just approval and sympathy from his fellow-men which his uprightness demands. The *mens conscia recti* will not avail for two consecutive hours without present human sympathy. He winces at motives misconstrued; he writhes at his false position, which drags its length along, day after day; he sickens at the hopeless, helpless future, and the pauper old age. These are the thoughts which write the wrinkles on him, and he carries some of the tawny light from that wretched court away with him—travel he north or travel he south, he has it still.

As Coleman stood in the box, he suppressed his anxiety and kept a composed front; he kissed the book serenely when it was presented to him, and swore to speak the truth and the whole truth.

The creditors were all present to oppose him. Old Trestle, who had been appointed Trade Assignee, towered near him and looked up at him from time to time. Unhappy little Soames stood near, and looked half sorry at the part he was forced to take; he gazed at the insolvent still with a covert appeal, as if even now, could he but obtain a whisper in his ear, he would compound on any terms and withdraw his opposition. There was Simmonds, the advertisement agent, who had been obliged to take up the bill, and the wound was smarting yet. There were creditors A, and B, and C, whispering and hounding one another on—highly incensed creditors, every one.

The registrar then read out the statement of the case, and mentioned the amount of assets placed in his hands—a mere fraction in the pound, scarcely worth talking of. The outstanding debts of the insolvent, and the estimated value of his paper, sounded somewhat more imposing, but did not seem to make much impression upon the commissioner, who observed very tartly that they were much more familiar in that court with such unrealized property figuring on neatly ruled paper than with substantial assets. No mistake about it, his honor was an old vixen, and he eyed the bankrupt with preconceived suspicion and severity.

Then the counsel appointed by the creditors stood up, and the examination began with an investigation as to the weekly expenses of the paper. The insolvent was next closely questioned upon the sudden and surreptitious sale of the furniture, concerning which he was able to give clear and satisfactory replies, which were easily substantiated. The pressure of his creditors was the cause of his account from Somerset House being so suddenly sent in, and when it came it was imperative: his books testified to the amount of that debt. There were then some questions put about his wife's money and plate which were settled upon her, and this matter was also satisfactorily disposed of. After which preliminaries the counsel proceeded to investigate somewhat suspicious ground.

"How comes it, sir, that the receipts for advertisements in your cash-book bear so small a proportion to the large amount you have paid for advertisement duties?"

Bankrupt. "A large number of my advertisements were necessarily gratuitous."

Counsel. "Were there not a large number fabricated?"

Bankrupt. "Not fabricated — that would be silly and useless. Many floating advertisements were inserted in my paper without any form of leave."

Counsel. "In fact, unauthorized?"

"Unauthorized," repeated the bankrupt.

Counsel. "How do you reconcile such a practice with the dealings of an honorable man of business?"

Bankrupt. "The practice I consider to be an innocent one. It injures nobody. The deceit involved in it is not more serious than in an ordinary business puff, and all struggling periodicals are reduced to such shifts at first. If you impeach me, you impeach two thirds of the London press."

Counsel. "What, sir! do you assert that two thirds of the respectable London press resort to such tricks for their existence?"

Bankrupt. "I talk of young periodicals, which comprise more than two thirds of the London press."

Counsel. "What is the reason, Mr. Coleman, that the amount appearing under the head of bad debts this year is so disproportioned to that appearing under the same head in other years?"

Bankrupt. "As a matter of course, I was unwilling to write off the bad debts till the last moment; I was naturally unwilling to admit the money was lost till it was lost."

Counsel. "Now, Mr. Coleman, while you so readily account for all these minor matters with an ingenuity which I shall leave to his honor and the assignees to characterize, how do you explain the deficiency of £1500 18*s.* 9*d.* in your cash-book?"

The bankrupt was silent; all eyes were turned on him.

Counsel. "Are you prepared for the question, Mr. Coleman?"

"I am, sir."

"Then why do you not answer?"

"It was a loss," said the bankrupt.

"A loss, sir! Was it on the turf?"

"I never bet," replied Coleman.

"Was it by cards?"

"No; it was a loss contingent to a business man."

"Yes, sir, such business men as we have to deal with to-day. On your oath, sir, what has become of this money?"

"I have lost it."

"On your oath, have you not feathered your nest with it?"

"You must choose another form of expression, sir," said Coleman; "I do not understand you."

"Come, sir," said the commissioner, "do you not understand the spirit and meaning of counsel's question?"

"I understand the insulting spirit of it well. He must explain his meaning."

"Well, then, sir, you shall have nothing to complain of. Have you not put aside this money, or a part of it, for your own use?"

"I have not."

"You say you lost this money: how did you lose it?"

"It was a gift," said Coleman, reluctantly—"I had better call it a gift."

"*A gift of your creditors' money? Oh indeed! Well, sir, to shift with you* to this new ground—to whom did you give it?"

"To a clerk in my office," replied the bankrupt.

"Oh! we are coming at it now," sneered counsel.

"Now," whispered Trestle, audibly, "here is the stale old story for you—the dodge of every bankrupt Jew. Mark my words: when we ask him where is this clerk, he'll tell us he's across the sea."

"Where is this clerk, sir?" asked counsel.

"He is in America," said the insolvent, firmly.

"Just so," sneered counsel.

And that sneer was taken up, and went buzzing through the crowd—very audible and unspeakably insulting it was to either honest man or knave. There was nothing to catch hold of in the sound, nothing to refute. A man tied down under a tropic sun might as well resent the mockeries of a horde of apes in the branches above him. Honest man or knave, he must endure the ordeal, and it is all right, no doubt, that it should be so. These pages mean no crusade against the license of the bankruptcy courts; we should rather complain that the meshes of the net are so wide that many an eel-like robber slips through and swims away.

"In America," repeated counsel. "Well, sir, this absence is timely."

Here followed several questions to identify this clerk—his name—the post he held—when he left—why he left—and so forth; and Coleman was so far able to substantiate his statement, through his counsel, as to show that some months previously his managing clerk had left his service suddenly and booked for America.

"Now, sir," continued counsel, "pray what induced you to endow your managing clerk with £1500 and upward of your creditors' money?"

"The circumstances were very peculiar, and of a nature I shrink from mentioning: it was an unwilling gift."

"On your oath, Mr. Coleman, will not this money you have shipped off to America revert to yourself in some shape?"

"No; I have said on oath it was lost to me and my creditors forever."

His Honor. "What do you mean by

an unwilling gift, Mr. Coleman? I have been listening to what seems to me a series of equivocations. Explain the words 'an unwilling gift.'"

"He took the money, and I forgave him."

"You mean he embezzled the money?"

"Well, it is a harsh word," said the bankrupt.

"Yes, sir, but an adequate one," said the counsel, quickly: "*a gift* may be an embezzlement also: so we have unearthed your explanation at last."

"I very earnestly wish," said bankrupt, "to save this young man's character, especially as I believe he has acted since then with perfect uprightness in his new employment, and gained the confidence of his employers. He made a confession to me, and threw himself on my mercy to save him from exposure, and unless my own honor is absolutely involved in the question, I must avoid farther explanation."

"Were you not aware, Mr. Coleman, when you forgave him, as you assert, that you must ultimately account for this money on your own responsibility?"

"I considered myself solvent at the time, and had good and reasonable hope of retrieving my loss by my paper."

His Honor. "You must be aware, sir, that your own honor and character is now involved in this investigation, and that you are placed under very equivocal circumstances, assuming your statement to be correct. Are you able to bring forward any written statement under this young man's hand to support the charge you have made against him, or have you any evidence of any nature beyond the unsupported statement you have made to this court?"

"I am sorry to say, your honor, I have none which can be made available."

"I have no more questions to ask, your honor," said counsel, sitting down, and the commissioner proceeded to make some observations upon the insolvent's conduct previous to refusing him his release.

"I must say," said he, "that in many years' experience in this court I have never yet met a more reluctant witness in that box. He can not plead simplicity or inexperience, for no one could be better qualified for fencing with counse and baffling assignees. His explana tions are without corroboration, an seem to me to be thoroughly unworth of credit, and wholly unsatisfactory t this court and the assignees."

The fire had been long kindling i Coleman's breast; he flushed beneat the lash, and at the last he spake wit his tongue.

"I said my evidence was not avail able here, but I have a witness to the truth of my statement, who, rather than see me suffer such a cruel and ruinous imputation as your honor has cast upon me, will appear in this court. My wife was present when I took the young man's statement."

This unexpected announcement produced some effect. Coleman's counsel came over to him, and asked him in a whisper why he did not mention this in the instructions. "Of course you will call her now." But Coleman had spoken in flush and heat, and already he began to repent. "It would be very painful for her to appear," he said; "I am very sorry I mentioned her name."

"It is imperative on you to call her now, Mr. Coleman," whispered his counsel, "for if you do not your creditors will."

This reason was a cogent one, and counsel proposed to his honor to summon Mrs. Coleman, whose evidence would be found entirely corroborative of the insolvent's explanation, having hitherto been withheld out of regard to the lady's feelings, the circumstances having been special and peculiar.

"I would wish to see my wife before she appears in the box," put in Coleman, anxiously.

Again the insulting sneer buzzed round.

"Ay, ay," whispered Trestle, very audibly, "he wants to school her."

"I have no wish to see her in private," said Coleman; "the assignees may be present if they please, and I pledge myself not to repeat my statement to her: she will give her account quite uninfluenced, and unquestionably without collusion, for I have named he unwillingly in this case."

The proposal, having taken this form seemed reasonable, and was acceded to

It being then one o'clock, the com missioner rose and left the court for re

freshment. Considerable interest had suddenly arisen, and not an individual of the crowd who filled the body of the court budged an inch from his place. There was a pleasing expectation of a great and signal scandal about to be exhibited—an exciting little drama in two acts, to be enacted in this lifeless old theatre. Here was this obstinate and sagacious bankrupt, taken at his word and about to be put to a crucial test; for his renewed reluctance in the conference with his counsel did not escape observation—here he is caught and fairly driven to bay.

There was, besides, a rare experiment of some general importance to be tried —a legal theory to be tested—a wife's evidence had been but lately admitted into civil cases. The theory so long received, that a Christian woman will perjure herself at the beck of her husband, may be found, after all, to be one of those popular dogmas received by all men, till, as in the old familiar tale of King Charles and the fish which was to displace no water in a brimming tub, it comes to be tried at last and is found untrue. There are a few in this most matrimonial metropolis who do not expect miracles from a wife's love while it lasts, whatever a wife's hate might effect, which has no peer.

A wife's love will do much and suffer much, no doubt. Having a high ideal standard before me, I firmly believe that it would extend to a noble risk of life, and to death itself. My friend again supposes its average amount to culminate in darning her husband's stocking and catering for his dinner, and calls it a mere graceful veneer upon convenience and necessity; but that a Christian woman would risk her soul's salvation that her husband should not lose his chattel, none of us are willing to believe. It is certain that a wife is likely to know best of her husband's affairs, his actions, words, and intents; it follows then that, if he be innocent of any charge, civil or criminal, she would probably be the prime and obvious witness toward his acquittal; whereas if she perjure herself for his sake, a woman's perjury lets in the light at a hundred chinks. In her social circle she may be cunning, no doubt, and, when not sternly held to the point, may fib very deftly; but the lens of her mind *is narrow*, and can not embrace within its field a large, liberal, integral lie, such as may deceive men.

When the commissioner had returned and taken his seat, he found the assignees in court, and Mrs. Coleman beside her husband in attendance. When her name was called she was led round to the box and placed in it.

"Take that book in your hand," said his honor, himself performing the office of the crier; "swear that you will speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God. Kiss the book."

Timidly, almost breathlessly, Eleanor kissed the book; then she looked his honor in the face. His honor looked very ugly and vixenish, and her eyelids sank again amid a complete and suspended silence. Her examination, after a few less important preliminaries, reached this material question:

"Were you ever present at an important interview between Mr. Coleman and his managing clerk, Mr. Wallace?"

"I was," she said, with a certain subdued enthusiasm of voice. Her zeal for her husband was put beyond a doubt by the intonation of those two little words.

"What was the nature of that interview?"

"The managing clerk in my husband's office came to make a confession."

Counsel echoed her answer, and inquired farther the nature of that confession.

"He came to tell my husband that he had—that he had—" repeated she, faltering, as if for want of some phrase rather than from any reluctance.

"Go on, ma'am—that he had what?"

"That a large sum of money was not —was not right."

"To confess that the money was not right," took up counsel. "Would you be so good as to put it plainer?"

"I caution you, ma'am, that you are on your oath," said the commissioner, shrewishly.

"He came to confess," said Eleanor, casting a quick, anxious look toward her husband, which was generally and demonstratively detected by the whole court, "he came to confess he had spent a large sum of money, fully intending to repay it."

"Did he seem to you ashamed of his conduct?" said the commissioner.

"He was in great difficulties, and hoped to repay the money," said Eleanor; "he repented very bitterly what he had done."

"I ask you, did he seem ashamed?" repeated the commissioner.

"He was, sir," said Eleanor, startled.

"Then why did he make you a witness of his disgraceful confession?"

"He first confessed to me, sir," said Eleanor.

"To you! what had you to do with it?"

"He wanted me to mediate for him with my husband," said Eleanor, aptly enough.

"And was your mediation successful?"

"It was; my husband promised not to prosecute him, and, if possible, to conceal his disgrace, as, if it got known, it would be his ruin."

"Now, madam, are you aware that your husband's good name and honor were probably involved in that hush-up and pardon?"

"It has become so, I fear," she murmured.

"And, pray, what claim had that thief and embezzler upon you, that you should beg him off after having ruined your husband?"

Eleanor's eyes filled again; she looked toward her husband for support.

"I wish to withdraw my wife as a witness, your honor," said Coleman, hotly; "I will take the consequences."

"You *can not* withdraw her now," said the commissioner, while again the buzz of incensed triumph arose. "You will do well not to disturb the court again." With this his honor repeated the question emphatically to the flushed and shrinking witness.

"Must I answer that question?" said Eleanor, appealingly.

"You must," said his honor, grimly, "and on your oath."

"It—it was my own brother." This answer produced a sensation, and came upon the court by surprise, though doubtless there must have been some *present, who* were lately connected with *Mr. Coleman's staff,* well aware of the *fact thus painfully elicited.*

"*What hour* was *it,*" said counsel, quickly, "when this confession took place?"

She thought for a moment before she answered.

"To the best of my recollection, it was about six in the evening."

"What month was it?"

"The end of May or beginning of June; I can not tell the exact day."

"Well, we don't want that. Where is your brother now?"

"In America."

"America is a large place. In what part?"

"He was in Canada when last I heard from him, and about thirty miles from Montreal."

"No doubt he bought a large farm in Canada, and stocked it well?" said counsel, with sarcastic meaning.

"No, he had but fifty pounds in his pocket when he left England."

"Oh! he had fifty pounds. Was this a remnant of his spoils?"

"No, I gave him it from the interest of money settled on myself."

"In what room was this confession made?" asked counsel, abruptly.

Eleanor's breath was a little taken by the sudden transition, but she quickly recovered herself.

"In the parlor," she replied.

"Were the tea-things laid?"

"They were," said Eleanor, wondering how the tea-cups could be implicated.

"Were the candles lighted?"

"They were," she said, panting.

"You said this interview took place about six o'clock in the end of May or the beginning of June—is it your habit to light the candles in broad daylight?"

"I—I don't understand," said poor Eleanor, confused, and looking a little wildly toward her husband.

"I took the amounts down by candle-light, after tea, your honor," put in Coleman, coming to her succor; "but the confession was made early in the evening."

"Be silent sir," said the commissioner, harshly. "You were not so ready to give information when you were called upon to do so." Then turning to witness, he demanded how she explained this contradiction.

"My brother came down from the drawing-room where he had been telling me," said Eleanor, now quite col-

cted, and even heated into womanly nphasis. "In the hall we found Will -I mean my husband—and the hour as, to the best of my recollection, bout six o'clock in the evening. We ien all went into the parlor, and my rother told my husband every thing. ; took long to explain it, and my husand had not written down the amounts ll after tea, and then the candles had een lighted a full hour."

"Had your brother the entire conrol of the cash-book?"

"I believe so—how *could* I know, ir?"

"What was the amount of money he onfessed to having spent?"

She thought and hesitated.

"I believe about £1500."

"How was it, then, that he possessed iimself of this money?"

"I do not understand," she faltered.

Here the commissioner interfered, the uestions involving information which he witness could not be supposed to ossess.

"Do you remember which of the ervants let your brother in?"

"I do not," she said, warily.

"How was your brother dressed?"

She thought and faltered.

"Why do you hesitate?" asked counel.

"Because you want to confuse me?" iid Eleanor, who never had done any arm to this fellow that he should perecute her so about trifles.

"How many conversations have you nd your husband had upon the evience you should give?"

"What evidence, sir?" she inquired.

"What evidence! why, this tale of our brother embezzling £1500?"

"I protest against this harsh and unentlemanly language used by counsel, our honor," said Coleman; "it is both seless and cruel."

"Mr. Coleman, I don't see why you hould call criminal actions by other han their right names in this court," aid his honor. "I was myself ready o interfere if any rudeness had been ffered to this lady, but I can not see hy we should mince terms with a witiess who, I am bound to say, has every ppearance of having been tutored in ier evidence."

"But it *is true, my lord,*" cried poor Eleanor *in a rain of tears,* "it is unhappily true, and I have my brother's letters in my pocket in which he alludes to it."

"You have his letters!" said the commissioner. "And why, madam, did you not produce them? It might have spared you a good deal of trouble and pain."

"I would have done so, but he would not let me," sobbed Eleanor, whose temper, by the way, was a little up on account of the opprobrium she had endured. Her announcement, thus adding an unexpected feature to the evidence, threw the highly emotional audience into fresh surprise, in which her husband had his share. Now Eleanor had laid little weight upon these letters, for she had supposed that the simple statement of a lady would be amply sufficient to set all straight; but she brought them notwithstanding, lest they might be needed; and now, with some honest indignation, she produced a bundle of them from her pocket, and, having opened several with anxious fingers, she selected two passages from the fine bold manuscript, and sent one of the letters into the hand of the registrar in a little flutter of very excusable triumph.

"Was your husband aware of the existence of these letters?" asked the commissioner.

"No, he was not. He knew my brother wrote to me, I dare say, but by agreement I never mentioned my brother's name to him since that day."

Solemnly and pompously, having adjusted his spectacles, the registrar began to read:

"*You do not know, my dearest Nellie, what a delightful beverage in this burning weather is gin sling.*" (Great laughter in court.)

"That's not it," said Eleanor; "I pointed to a place lower down. I will pencil the passage if you will let me."

But by this time the registrar had lighted upon the right place, and read out in a commonplace business voice:

"£1500! *My dearest Nell, in my present poverty it seems to me such an endless debt, but until I have paid every fraction to William, I shall feel more like a convict than a settler in this strange land.* I shall work myself to *the bone* to repay it, and then he will *forgive me at last.*"

"Here is another passage," said Eleanor, and she sent over another letter to the registrar's hand, who read the following:

"*It is now three months since I left your house in Hornsey Road, after that dreadful scene with William, when you strove to make my peace. Dear Nellie, I count it years—I have lived so much and so heavily since then.*"

The letters containing these passages were then handed down to counsel, and by him passed round among the creditors for their perusal.

"Is there any one here who could swear to that handwriting?" said the commissioner.

"I can, your honor," said one of the creditors, frankly. "This is Mr. Wallace's writing; I know it well."

Two of Mr. Coleman's clerks were present and certified to the same, and, supported by these passages, Mrs. Coleman's evidence was deemed conclusive. A complete reaction favorable to the insolvent set in. The creditors, after a short consultation, expressed themselves, through counsel, as entirely satisfied with the explanation, and stated it as their intention to withdraw all opposition. The commissioner expressed himself in very changed terms from his late severe comments in granting the insolvent's release, and making the due order that he should receive his certificate.

Thus was Coleman rescued from a false and equivocal position, and the utility of the late change in the law of evidence proved by a precedent.

Conscious of the unintentional injustice of their opposition, the creditors sent Mr. Coleman, some days after, a gratifying testimonial, signed by them all, to the effect that he had acted under very difficult circumstances, like an upright business man, and if he had been somewhat unwise in exposing himself to so much painful suspicion, it was owing to a kindness and humanity which they were bound to respect. Be it observed, however, that, ere this testimonial was sent, the assignees had effected a satisfactory sale of his paper, which had afforded a liberal dividend to the creditors, and realized the estate on the neatly-ruled paper so slighted by the commissioner.

When all was quiet and business at an end, and Coleman's affairs had sul sided into most respectable ruin, he re called his little son home, and wrote t his mother in Somersetshire, proposing that himself, his wife, and child should pay her the long-promised visit at last. Like a country breeze by post, so fresh and welcome was it, came the hearty reply from rustic Mrs. Coleman: straightforward was its tenor, and thrifty of endearing expletive; but it said just what she felt.

"Dear Will,—I received your letter this morning saying you were coming to me, and I reply to it at once. This is still your home, and you don't need an invitation. Come back to me as you used at the summer holidays, and I'll scold you and spoil you by turns, as I used to twenty years ago, though I don't expect you'll want the horsewhip now. I shall be very glad to see my daughter-in-law and grandchild, neither of whom I have ever seen; but tell Nellie what a plain house I live in — no powdered footmen here, but servants with heads like door-mats and shoes a stone weight. You met with little kindness, poor boy! from your father while he lived, but we'll see if we can't make it up to you now; so wind up your affairs as soon as you can, and come home.

"Your affectionate mother,

"Martha Coleman.

"N.B.—Make some inquiries for me about this new threshing-machine; I seem to think it would answer very well."

CHAPTER V.

I beg to place my reader in a second class carriage of the night-mail South Western, running at the perilous rate of sixty miles an hour. We are familiar with the sensation—the long lurching swing of the vehicle, the roar through the tunnel like present destruction, and the scream of the whistle, giving vividness to the alarm, the reckless jolt and the giddy draught, yet withal the sense of exhilaration given by speed, flight, escape from the mile that troubled you and from the care.

The sun is down and the hills have forgotten him already, having faded into

cold slate color; they seem to glide along solemnly with the train, while cattle, fences, houses, and roads dart back in blending rout.

Under the light of the solitary little lamp, which burns with an isolated tranquillity amid the rush of elements, sit three travelers close together by the closed window; they are the sole occupants of the carriage. The gentleman, Mr. Coleman, bankrupt, late proprietor of a certain class newspaper, is now leaving London in company with his wife and only child—leaving London with the same regret a man might feel in leaving a vault in which he had been locked and half stifled, just greeted by the fresh air and life—casting behind him London's work and associations; with the same regret with which a man might lay down a loathsome burden tied to him for days.

As he was swept on and away, with all he loved best within the girth of his arms, it seemed as if a coil were gradually unloosening its festering clasp from his heart.

Awa, whigs, awa! politics are nothing to us now; lawyers, brokers, and duns are but as ghosts, which will vanish at cockcrow to-morrow, and leave us among the meadows and sunshine. Custom bills, Bill A and Bill B, price currents, advertisement agents, editors, penny-a-liners, pay-days without dividends, paper merchants, and all the rest of it, one vast soakage of life and hope, perish all in the distance. *Damnati sint*—let them be accursed! we are bound to the old home which is opened to receive us after ten years' absence, and we think not of retrieving or fencing now; we look for rest, merely rest.

About ten years ago Coleman left home on bad terms with his father, and began life, without friends or money, at the age of twenty-five. Further, not to be surpassed in boldness, while yet an humble clerk he married a young lady from Taunton, who brought him the interest of about £2000, the capital being locked up in the custody of trustees. Then Coleman, a man of some practical sagacity, and watchful of his opportunities, contrived to struggle into a business which seemed so rotten that its proprietor, a sly old rat, presently sold it to him and sneaked away.

Soon after a sanguine gentleman, who was tempted to join in it, suddenly withdrew his capital and bolted out of it in a panic. But Coleman stood steadily to the helm, and brought the business through every peril, till it became since then a thriving and well-known firm, which need not be named here. He sold it advantageously, and cleared about £2000 by the transaction; whereupon, being turned of thirty, and having acquired steadiness, judgment, and character, he committed the great mistake of his life—namely, sunk this money in the class newspaper—and entered straightway upon the sea of troubles which, as we have seen, beat him down at last.

His child, sleeping in the shade of his rough gray coat, has nestled its face away from sight, but a yellow tumult of curls swells from beneath his cap, with that beautiful sheen upon each small billow peculiar to childhood; you see it still on those treasured little love-locks of deceased babies and children when the heads which grew them are but ivory caskets beneath the daisies.

Eleanor and her husband are in heart to-night. She has led him to talk of his old home, and he is telling her with half pathos, half jest, all he remembers of it before his father died. She is asking him some questions also on her own account, inquiring with much interest about the neighboring doctor, whether he was skillful in the diseases of children.

"I believe there is a doctor, a capital old gossip, near at hand, Nell, who will just suit you. He has a most judicious trick of gently alarming and relieving an anxious mother by turns, like blowing a bellows, you know, by which process he finds he can keep his own pot boiling. By heavens! he has a great pestle and mortar, as big as a christening font, always at work, compounding juvenile pills, warranted harmless as comfits."

He was always chaffing her *more mariti* upon this weak point—her apprehension about her child's health; and Eleanor took refuge from him in another important inquiry. "Is the church near, Will?"

"Within about half a mile," he replied. "By the way, Nell, you must never expect my mother to accom

pany us to church, unless she is greatly changed since I was at home."

"What, never?" said Eleanor, somewhat startled.

"I am not the least uneasy," he replied, "but that you will love and respect my mother when you know her, so I will let you into a little secret about her character. When my mother takes a prejudice she never parts with it; that prejudice strikes down a great tap-root into her nature; you might as well try to pull up an oak-tree; all the reasoning in the world would have only the effect of thumping the soil harder about the roots. It happened, Nell, that the clergyman of our parish —a very excellent man, I believe, but deuced sharp at a bargain, like your worthy husband—made a good thing of a cow he sold to her, which he had stocked for two or three days, till she was nearly bursting with milk. My poor mother was certain she had bought a twenty-quart milker at least. Why, bless your heart! the poor cow scarcely accomplished four quarts a day. What do you think of that, Nell?"

"What a shame!" cried Eleanor.

"Well, that may be, but to this day my mother brands the whole church universal with that swindle of milk, from the Archbishop of Canterbury down to the Curate of St. Bees. She gave up going to church forthwith, and performed service for herself in private."

"I did not fancy your mother like that, Willie."

"But she can be kind, my poor mother," he continued, with emphasis; "you will like her a little more and more every day till you grow to love her as I do. She has a primitive honesty about her, which is above all price if rarity gives value—a kindly inoffensive honesty which makes no fuss. She never was guilty of a trick in her life, and prides herself upon it."

"I am sure we shall like one another," murmured Eleanor, with involuntary indecision.

"One great comfort about her, Nell, is this—little worries never touch her temper; you will know when she is displeased by her silence. How I used to understand her as a young child, and used to get out of her way when she fell into one of her silent passions, which was double as dangerous as my father's fits of violence! Many a good thrashing she gave me, which I earned well. But she was the most generous, unsuspecting, gullible of mothers: there was a rough nobility about her, as I remember her, and a fidelity of fondness when once she took a fancy, which somehow her peculiar faults seemed to me to enhance."

"So I am going to live in your old home with you really at last, Will! You have told me so much about it since our marriage, that I long to see it, yet I never got a true notion of a place or person (pull your coat round Johnnie's head a little more; there's a draught from the window, love)—description never gave me a true notion of place and person, and I am sure somehow it will be quite different from what I fancy."

"Why, Nell, it must be altered," he said, gravely. "My poor father is gone since I was there, you know. A pity, Nell, we did not make a trip home in his lifetime, that he and I might have made it up. It damps the pleasure of this return, I can tell you, to think of the lost chance," said he, with a sigh. "I shall feel so unforgiven in the old rooms."

Now listen to Eleanor for a touch of her trade; mark how she will come artfully round him to pour in the oil and wine.

"Is the picture we have very like him, Will?"

"What—the miniature? It is like enough to remember the poor old face by."

"Do you remember showing that picture to your father's farm bailiff when he came to visit us, and telling him you would not take a thousand pounds for it, and that you hung it on the sunniest wall in the house?"

"I said something of the kind, I believe. I wonder is old Michael living yet?"

"You know Michael told us," continued Eleanor, confidentially, "he would be closely cross-examined about you by your father when he went home; and, although Mr. Coleman would not confess it, Michael was in some sort an embassador to report how you looked and how you felt toward him."

"Ay, ay, I let that chance slip throu

my wretched pride; no good fretting about it now."

"Well, I may as well confess to you—I charged old Michael to repeat what you said about the picture word for word to your father, and I know he did so."

"How like you, you little conspirator!" said Coleman, quietly; and, as if it touched him nothing, he returned to his account of his mother, which in the foregoing eulogiums the reader is warned not altogether to trust. "My mother will surely try to make a farmer of you, Nell; she is always mounted on her mud clogs, God bless her! from morning till night. You must learn from her how to put the curd in press, and how to make butter, and I'll teach you how to catch trout in our little river—the only stream in the whole country."

"Then I have one comfort," said Eleanor, interrupting him; "you can't upset me out of a boat, as you did at Kew, when you tried to row with two oars before you had learned to row with one, and we were—"

"Nellie," he said, with a hand on her arm, "were you really serious just now? Did you bid Michael tell my words to father?"

"Indeed I did, Willie—of course I did—you may ask Michael."

He pressed her to him closely.

"Do you know, Nellie, you could hardly have meant it, but I can't tell you how I am relieved; it was the only damp to my happiness to-night."

Didn't she mean it, though! that's all he knew about her.

And now the train begins to slacken its speed, the lamp of the pointsman flits by, and they arrive at the cheerful wide station amid a labyrinth of iron rails. The porter calls out the name of the station, the doors are flung open, and Coleman is at his journey's end. He lifts out the half-wakened child, hands out his wife, secures her five-and-twenty little parcels (a lady never traveled with less) which strew the seat, looks after the substantial luggage forward, and sees every thing stowed in safety on his mother's chaise, which is in attendance. Ten minutes' drive brought them to Hill Side front entrance, and up the short dark avenue to the house.

The hall door was hospitably open; Coleman leaped down all in a glow. He lifted Eleanor bodily across to the hall door steps, and hastily put down the dazzled child beside her.

"I hear my mother's voice in the hall," he whispered, with all the eagerness of the boy. "Call her mother, Nell." He put them in both before him, and his mother met them on the threshold and embraced him.

How did she look to the stranger Eleanor in the lamplight? A square-framed old lady dressed in rustling gray silk; her face was of the broad build of her son's, and was full of pale blitheness this night—a square-jowled, low-fronted, yet bland old countenance, that told its own story at a look. There were the remains of robust beauty about it. The hands outstretched to her son were strong and sinewy even to the wide finger ends. She gave him one hearty kiss of welcome, and no more of such foolery, though she had not seen him but once and again these ten years.

"And this is your little boy?" she said, turning to Eleanor with a civil welcome. "Come in, dear; you are all very welcome home."

She ushered them in, going before them, and treading freely and heavily—a most independent footfall, suggestive of no spindle limbs beneath.

Her son whispered to Eleanor, "You must love her, Nellie: it is the same trusty old mother—the same old home."

He entered the warm sitting-room with a confident, happy smile on his face, content and proud of his mother's welcome. The next moment that smile faded away, for at the fire within stood a stranger.

The bloom of the hour was somehow dashed. His heart was just foolish and open, his memory alight with the enthusiasm of old times; and here he was confronted, detected by a strange inquisitive face, and suddenly thrown back into defensive formality—the bloom of the hour was somehow gone.

"This is a particular friend of mine, Will; you have been such a stranger these many years, you have not met him before—Mr. Kent, my agent."

"In plain English," said the stranger, "your mother's farm bailiff. I am proud to make the acquaintance of her son: you'll find me a business man, Mr. Col

man — give you a sound opinion of a horse, a cow, or a sheep. Your mother and I have worked together these six years, and never had a misunderstanding, so you and I sha'n't be like to quarrel."

"You remember Squire Kent's house, Will, beyond Pow Hill?" said his mother: "this is one of the squire's sons."

What were the man's credentials or ability to poor Coleman, who had just come home and longed for its sacred seclusion? He bowed and murmured some acknowledgment, and stood awkwardly at the fire, flattering himself that this interloper had some delicacy, and on the first evening, at least, would take the excuse to withdraw.

Mr. Kent was some years his junior, a fine burly figure, and a florid, not uncomely face, full of audacious good-nature and vulgarity. He had a profusion of surging light hair, and a pair of large yellow whiskers, which were far more demonstrative in their prominence than his features. This gentleman applied himself to converse with Coleman, while Eleanor was brought up to her room by the old lady; and his manner was somewhat wild—it had a reckless affability about it, meant rather for good fellowship than for insolent familiarity, of which latter it had all the effect.

With the intention, perhaps, of giving Coleman the advantage and scope of a familiar subject, Kent knocked his giddy head against his man's sorest point at once: with the tact of a butcher, he sent his first thrust right into the quick. In point of fact, he opened on the poor bankrupt upon the mortality of small city newspapers, which never, to Mr. Kent's knowledge, made their appearance in all Somersetshire. Now there's a sporting paper, the "Field," or "Bell's Life"—that's a safe speculation. There's an illustrated paper, like "Punch," or the "London News"—there's a safe investment. Somersetshire folk, to Mr. Kent's certain knowledge, take these papers in, and can understand them. A man's newspaper after breakfast must be light reading, and of universal interest. Let Mr. Coleman appeal to his own experience; and what they like in Somersetshire, why, *they liked throughout* all England, he *supposed, just the same.*

"*I have the 'Field'* and 'Bell's Life' regularly on Sunday morning on my table."

"Your office is in the house, sir?" said Coleman, interrogatively.

"I shall be very happy to show it to you when you tire of the ladies," said Mr. Kent, "and I will give you a pipe, and a good glass of toddy to take the cold of your journey out of your stomach."

"Thank you, sir," said Coleman, coldly; "I have much to say to my mother to-night."

"Oh! well, any other night, or every night—just the same to me; I am established in the house as one of the family, you may say."

"Oh indeed!" said Coleman.

So chillingly was that little ejaculation uttered, that all Mr. Kent's blazing straw of conversation died out on the spot; and when at length the old lady and Eleanor returned, the latter saw in one womanly glance there was something awkward and wrong between the gentlemen. With an earnest wish that all should go off smoothly on this first critical night, while her husband drew his mother to the sofa, to renew, as it were, their loving acquaintance, severed by such a chasm of time, she exerted herself to talk and listen to Mr. Kent, though, being now such a domestic animal, her social powers had very much run to seed in the nursery.

Kent was respectful in manner, and was evidently a little fascinated; for, though a coarse unlettered man, he had a distinct perception of the attractive kindness of her face, and could not but be flattered and gratified by her attention.

Eleanor's effort, highly disagreeable to herself, was made with the best intention, and evidently appreciated by her husband, who looked over gratefully at her, more than once regretting perhaps his own loss of temper toward the man, and relieved by her shielding aid from the impertinence of a stranger's observation. But, amid all her laudable exertions, poor Eleanor received a rebuke, and from the most unexpected quarter, too.

It was when her husband had left the room to fetch down to his mother a little present from town, which he and his wife had conjointly chosen, that the old lady walked over to the window in si-

ence, and again crossed the floor to the ire, muttering as she passed Eleanor omething about "chattering town ladies."

Before Eleanor could reason on the neaning of the phrase, she felt the manling blood over forehead and neck. No sooner did her husband return than, ising with rather scant ceremony, she came over to him, and never stirred rom his side till it was time to retire.

But long before that time arrived the cloud had passed away from old Mrs. Coleman's face; she showed herself quietly gratified with the presents, which consisted of a handsome watered silk gown and carbuncle bracelets.

She said, as she looked at them and felt them, that it was a right comely gown and trinkets, and that it was a lady chose them, so that she would thank Eleanor for them, not her poor looby, Will. In that quiet way of showing her pleasure, Eleanor saw a resemblance to her husband, and in many little looks and touches she still recognized a sort of rough translation, as it were, of his manner. Somewhat to her relief, however, it did not gain in strength beyond this first night.

That night, when Eleanor and her husband were sitting up over the fire, gossiping into the small hours, as was their custom, they had a visit from the old mistress. She sat with them there, her slippers on the fender, and her gown folded comfortably on her lap, and joined in with their conversation in a healthy, robust style. She made her son a little speech in bidding him goodnight, which had something of apology about it, and was taken by him as such. "I am a farmer, Will, and shall leave you and Eleanor very much alone. Eleanor won't be sorry for that—will you, dearie? Mr. Kent and I are afield with the men all the day."

CHAPTER VI.

"MIND you call her mother," said Coleman, as they came down to breakfast in the morning.

Eleanor found an unconquerable difficulty in calling her so. The epithet seemed to catch in her throat. She had often, indeed, addressed her so by letter, but then it was dashed off with a running pen and thought of no more. About two years previously she had lost her own mother; her husband, when he came home that evening, found her sitting on the stairs in hysterical grief, a black-edged open letter dropped at her feet. Her own mother was another type of woman from the robust and rustic old lady who claimed the loving epithet—a slender and dove-eyed mtoher, antiquely refined, was that other. Mrs. Coleman received them alone in the plain airy parlor; its walls and furniture, its white table-cloth, were orange-tipped and tinted by the hospitable fire. She was a farmer, indeed, this morning, buckramed to the throat in a warm garment, which might be described as a cross between a great-coat and a pelisse. As she came forward, there was a tramp from her heavy shoes on the crumb-cloth and naked boards.

She was still friendly and independent in her address, scorning the mere formalities of hospitality, but she unconsciously almost won over Eleanor's affections that morning by the marked fancy she seemed to take to her little grandchild. The old lady caught him with guile. She seemed to have some rough knowledge of children's nature, for she made no demonstrative advance, but waited till the child's eye fell upon her spontaneously; then, in the voice of a familiar old playmate, she drew him over to the window to look at the pony upon the lawn—over-strayed Johnnie under a spell, and presently was beguiled into friendship by a confidential word or two of a little saddle which had come all the way from Wells. After breakfast she invited him out, that he might give the pony a crust. Stoutly she trod before him to the door, and stood at it beckoning, and twinkling over at him with an old playmate-look. He took a step or two, faltered, and looked wistfully at his mother.

"Come along, sonny, till we feed Jock the pony—come along, till we see Jock the pony," laughed granny.

They had scarcely crossed the gravel when the foolish mother was after them, having suddenly bethought her how a child was once kicked to death by a vicious horse; and she called after the reckless old lady, and exacted a promise from her that Johnnie should not be left near the pony's hoofs. And, in

deed, she had rather he did not feed it either: the vision arose before her of the little blue-veined hand gobbled off in a moment.

"I'll make him as hardy as a wild duck," chuckled the old lady, leading off her prize.

Johnnie came back safe and gay to his mother, having ridden the pony, granny holding by the mane and leading him along.

Meantime the redoubtable old lady had been summoned away by her farm bailiff, and was afar on the headlands with him, striding over the clods.

"Mamma," said Johnnie, "what did Mr. Kent mean by saying to grandmamma that all of us should be up with the lark when he was master here?"

"No, no, Johnnie," said his mother, "I am sure he did not say that—I am sure he said 'if he were master here.'"

"*If he were master here*," repeated Coleman, quietly. "My mother is not right to lift that fellow out of his proper place."

"Oh, well," said Eleanor, quickly, "he is of good family, you know. Come out with me, Will, and show me over the place, and you shall be merry eighteen again, and leap the fences for me, as you used."

"I'll have you put a double stitch on my waistcoat buttons, then," smiled Coleman. "Come along, wifie. I wonder would you and I have been good playmates then?"

She had marked the shade of mortification over him, and she drew him out into the country air. She appointed him her *cicerone* over all his boyish haunts: the crumbling coach-house wall, against which he used to play handball, was another Colosseum to her for venerable interest; the mark where he used to hop the ball was still on the flag; and then he led her along the trout-stream by a briery path to show her the little reach in which he caught a pound-weight fish—the bush in which he lost another, which wriggled away into the water again. He pointed out the grassy bank on which he used to watch the otter run beneath the veteran ash-tree. She scrutinized that river as if it had been a golden stream of Bendigo. So he played the showman, pleased and interested by her sympathy, skillfully coaxed by her out of the momentary shadow, and living over again in her company all the pleasant pranks and holidays of boyhood, as they two wandered dreamily through the grounds.

Let me, during their wanderings, offer a short description of the house and place, which it will be needful to remember in subsequent events.

At the gate were the stable and small court-yard, and all along the hedged border of the place ran the small river Quick, till it took a whimsical bend before arriving at the entrance, and followed the by-road away to the street of the little town behind the hill.

Entering the gate, you passed up the short gravel-walk to the front of the house. Now there was a peculiarity in the situation of the house, which was, as it were, built in the square cleft of a hill-side, such a choice of site being by no means uncommon in Somersetshire. The house was, in fact, in the embrace of a sort of racket-court, as it were, which formed an area at the back, contained between the back walls of the house and a solid hill-side wall of about nine feet sheer. There were sloping parapets on either side, which you ascended by rude stone steps. The hill was beautiful and wild. For about a rood from the house it was laid out in untrimmed garden-beds, and then came an ancient wall stained with mosses and lichens, and thickly bossed with shining ivy. Beyond swelled the glad green hill, planted with grotesque apple-trees hunched and elbowed, climbing up the slope in an antic throng, till you saw the crowning file of them atop spider-limbed against the sky. Old ash pollards, shooting out a hundred horns from their clumpy heads, grew on the surrounding fence, and there was a rolling surf of rich green grass, arabesqued with the shadows of the trees, and dappled with blue-bells in the early summer. Over the hill was a winding path, which led by a short cut to the little town beyond, but it was not much frequented.

The house was of the ordinary modern build, square and blue-tiled, containing four rooms below, namely, a large parlor looking out in front, and an unpretending drawing-room looking in the same direction; the latter was seldom inhabited, except on such a gala occa-

sion as a prodigal's return. A comfortable little sitting-room was appropriated by the old mistress to Eleanor's use, wherein she might be as private as she pleased. The windows of this sitting-room looked out from the side wall, owing to the above-mentioned peculiarity in the situation of the house. The fourth room on the ground floor was small and ill-lighted, being Mr. Kent's office, in which he kept his accounts and pay-books. He seldom had business there till night, except, indeed, on pay-day, when the workmen came floundering in to him one by one and received their week's wage.

Right over the sitting-room, covering both it and the hall, was old Mrs. Coleman's bedroom; her step was distinctly audible when she crossed the boards, thrilling down the slight partitions; and the fact, moreover, of the same flue connecting the two apartments, altogether made the lower room almost as sensitive as a whispering gallery to sounds from above. On a level with the window-sill of Mrs. Coleman's bedroom, and at some two yards' distance, was the parapet where the hill had been cut away, and a narrow flagged area lay between parapet and window, into which a back door opened. Here was a large butt for catching rain-water, and also a good pump with a stone trough at its foot. The room above the parlor was given to Coleman and his wife as a bedroom, and was furnished for them with every luxury the house could afford. They surely could in no respect complain of their reception; the old mistress delighted to honor them in her own quiet unpretending way.

She placed her son at the foot of the table at dinner, and when, a few days after, he expressed a wish to accompany her over the farm, she heartily bade him do so, and, with Mr. Kent at her other side, gave attentive ear to his opinions and advice.

But then she told him in private, as she stroked his shoulder caressingly, he had better stay with Eleanor in future.

"Mr. Kent is discontented at your meddling in the business of the farm, Will, and I can not play safety-buffer to ye two men *if ye go growling* and girn*ing at each of my* elbows all the day; it's like I'd lead a happy life," said she, laughing.

But when she saw he did not respond to her laugh, she repeated gravely, "And you must not leave Eleanor alone. I will have my grandson with me in your stead."

"His mother will have a word to say to that, I fancy," said Coleman, carelessly.

"I covet that child, Will, and I must have him; I am too lusty i' the waist to play good fairy to him, but my fondness won't do him harm."

"Well, well, I leave him between you and his mother," laughed Coleman, swallowing his vexation. "I see you are going to put Johnnie to ride on the stick you used to lay across my shoulders."

It is strange the superior fascination a granny can exert over a child to a mother — whether it be that the extremes of age seem to approximate and become magnetic. A mother's love, perhaps, is too solicitous and authoritative, whereas a granny is apt to have a touch of the old rebel about her, and to rest her attractions upon a mutinous collusion with her pet to defeat all constituted authority.

This muscular old granny was not the less attractive to her small-boned scion in that she was great, and strong, and unconquerable in his eyes. His trim little figure was to be seen trotting after her on foot, or on the pony day by day as she walked with her farm bailiff through the grounds. He was to be seen following her up and down through the house, holding on by her dress or by her middle finger. She allotted him a little flower-bed wherein to make dirt pies and root up flowers; a tiny spade and barrow were his, and in the evenings, when she was home, he watched how lustily granny's big spade turned over the earth-heaps in her neighboring tulip-bed, and tried to mimic her on a small scale.

Eleanor, though kept in a constant fright, did not meddle in the alliance much, and, to quiet her misgivings about the parapet and river, granny had a wooden paling and barricade erected along each perilous border. These precautions, in a great measure, set Eleanor's fears at rest; and as to the peril from wild cows, wandering infectio

stalking hooping-coughs, scarlatinas, and small-pox, she was obliged to smother her uneasiness as well as she could, for she met with intolerance and ridicule from both her husband and his mother.

In some respects Eleanor was a fool. She had lost two infants by water on the brain, and now, of this her first-born and only child, she was as timidly anxious as a poor puss, all whose kittens are drowned save one.

Granny had a pretty cot swinging between a two-post stand, placed at the foot of her funereal old bed, so fond did she grow of her pet at last, and often she would induce his mother to permit him to sleep there, though Eleanor was secretly loth to let him out of her sight at those feverish hours when young pulses flutter in sleep, and the hand and forehead of children grow dry and hot. She could not but acknowledge, however, what her husband constanly pointed out to her, that Johnnie grew strong and rosy apace.

But, if she courted the company of her grandchild, old Mrs. Coleman spent little of her time with her son: she seemed monopolized by this farm bailiff during more than business hours. Her son sat very much at home with his wife, and spoke freely to her upon his grievance, not fretfully or impatiently, for he even employed, according to his wont, a half-jesting tone in his complaints; but it was evidently resting on his mind, for he returned to it again and again. Eleanor shunned the subject, and scarcely ventured a comment upon it.

At a first glance, indeed, he did not seem to have much cause of complaint. He was placed at the foot of the table; his wishes and those of his wife were consulted in all household matters; he seemed to fill the place of master there; but he felt himself in a difficult and a [illegible]se position. His gorge was rising [illegible]ainst this interloper, but his delicacy, [illegible]dependent man and a guest of his [illegible]er, restrained him, and he felt the [illegible]sity of masking his dislike. The [illegible]lty of preserving the nice adjust[illegible] of manner between an avoidance [illegible]ntimacy and an effect of slight was [illegible] more difficult with a man of such [illegible]morous affability as Mr. Kent. His mother, indeed, had bespoken his civility for her agent with some little show of awkwardness, as if she felt the request were unreasonable; she begged him to sit with the man after dinner a while, and go through a daily ordeal of self-restraint and formality.

"I am indebted to him very much, Will. You will not find him disagreeable—you know he comes of good family. Squire Kent, his father, once owned the whole freehold farm of Littlemere, and was as good a man as your father. I wish you to be civil to Mr. Kent, Will."

He promised her to fulfill her wishes, and, with a stiff sense of duty upon him, fixed an attentive gaze on Mr. Kent's face during his bunkum stories, smiled faintly at his jokes, and nodded at his dogmas, leaving them where he found them. He was diligent to banish from his demeanor the slightest air of superiority, and no gentleman could have required more at his hands; but, to Kent's thinking, his reserve soon grew offensive; the coarse and voluble good-fellowship, still held courteously at arm's length, began to exhibit a slight insolent flavor. Coleman bore with him: he sat with him courteously after dinner, till he chose to rise; he introduced newspaper topics and agricultural, overlooking many little sneering turns in which his companion chose to indulge, and becoming mildly deaf when any remark was made touching on a family matter. He began to understand the man better, however, and to discover that, though a wild and noisy fellow, whose conversation was presumptuous, copious, and flat, he was by no means insignificant; for if his tongue was rash and unprofitable, it never betrayed him, and his acts were prompt and business-like. He was like a wind-mill whose sails swung uncouthly wide and beat the air, but which ground the corn steadily within. There was, in fact, an underlying practical cunning under all this noise. Not that the manner was assumed for a concealment, however, that his objects might ambush behind them—the manner and the rattle were mere temperatement and innocent effervescence; his business qualities formed altogether another establishment, and were to be detected by other tokens. There was, in fact, a fire-safe amid all the blazing straw. Evidently, howev-

er, he was what is called a good-natured man — amiability of that class which runs with slack principle, and often forms a basis to all the vices of our nature. We may christen it the tavern temperament — the good-nature which sends the brimmers round and pays the lordly score—which wrings your hand with a benediction, and giddily blows a slander on you about the country—yet shrewd enough to guard itself. The type is the most worthless of our nature.

It disquieted Coleman, then, to perceive that this man enjoyed the entire confidence of his mother. Her affection for himself did not, indeed, seem to be prejudiced by this influence, and she was solicitous beyond her nature to show him it was not so; yet she was evidently controlled by Kent behind the scenes. This was the more perplexing, considering that she was strong and energetic beyond her sex; honest and simple, she went right through with what she undertook with a native self-reliance. It looked untoward for her advantage, and it seemed almost to menace her happiness that this wild, unprincipled man should be to her such an intimate confidant.

In the afternoons, when sitting up stairs with his wife (he kept much with her now, I repeat, for idleness also was beginning to oppress his spirits), he used to watch his mother's square old figure, with its straightforward step, walking down the field beside the tall, portly farm bailiff in his gaiters and velveteens; he could catch the man's jovial laugh as he drew his fingers through his large yellow whiskers now and again. Coleman watched their familiarity with a jealous eye.

"I must abdicate, Nellie—I must abdicate, I see. I'll rule you all the harder," said he, smiling still.

CHAPTER VII.

Eleanor, under the natural impulse of a stranger in a situation which could not be estimated, perhaps, for many days, began to observe anxiously the little signs that indicated the true character of her new home, and to note the ways of the house as far as she was able. She put certain questions to herself which she could not ask another—How far was her husband to be considered master here, and what amount of influence did he possess over his mother? What place should she be called upon to fill—whether that of a mere visitor, or one who held a certain amount of delegated authority in her husband's right? The causes of a woman's happiness or unhappiness in a given place are of another fibre, and work on other nerves than those which touch a man's peace. She may despise and stand apart from all the manœuvres and jealousies draughting through the female part of the establishment, which a man only smiles at, but the pain and daily worry are hers, though she escape the taint. She had confidence in herself, however, and it was not in her nature to give wanton offense; she had no pretensions and no expectation save that she should be mistress of her own conscience, and free to enjoy the society of her husband and child. This frame of mind kept her observation alive. That little unaccountable outbreak of Mrs. Coleman on the first night of her arrival produced an impression upon her which she could not forget; and though she never mentioned the incident to her husband, yet, like an insignificant riddle which teases and importunes us so as sometimes to break our night's rest, the solution of that most unmerited little snub troubled her, and the impression left by it induced her to avoid Mr. Kent with an instinct of caution. Her avoidance of him was the more marked because Kent made many little efforts to break through it: he would strive to catch her eye at dinner, and address little complimentary, yet respectful speeches to her, which she received with palpable discouragement. Now she observed that the old lady grew fonder and heartier to her in proportion as this repulsion of Mr. Kent's acquaintance caught her notice, and this heartiness had all the significance of gratitude. What did this mean? So frank and confiding was Mrs. Coleman herself to Kent, that it could not arise from sympathy in Eleanor's apparent dislike to him. Her favor and concessions toward the farm bailiff, whenever they came within Eleanor's ken, seemed to her, in a negative sense at least, to do her husband great wrong. A lit

scene took place in her own bedroom about this time which threw some light upon her perplexity.

There was a pretty delicate Irish girl in the establishment; she had large misty eyes and a hollow cheek, and up from the kitchen through the house rose her continual low cough. She came to Eleanor timidly, and told her that the mistress bade her to wait on her and make herself useful in needlework or in minding the child.

Eleanor had taken a sort of interest in the girl at sight, and had, moreover, been a little perplexed by her. She seemed under some unaccountable and continual awe of old Mrs. Coleman, which completely unnerved her in her presence; yet the old lady displayed no harshness in her manner toward the girl, and seemed rather to have treated her with kindness and consideration.

Eleanor so far accepted her services that she set her down to some light needlework in her own bedroom, during which she put some questions to her about her health—how long she had her cough, if she had seen a doctor, and so forth.

The girl seemed continually weeping ripe, and sobs seemed struggling out through her speech. Surely she could not always be so through the day; half an hour before she was still and unmoved enough in the kitchen. She had evidently some smothered grief in her mind, and could conceal it well enough till she came within the thrill of a kind voice. Whenever Eleanor spoke to her up struggled the sob.

Now Eleanor was guiltless of even the temptation to arrive at the gossip of the house through a servant, and out of the most single-minded compassion did strive to come at this grief by a ' ' ıd inobtrusive approach. There was ɜ prelude of a violent fit of crying be- 'e the girl could be induced to say thing; she then bespoke Eleanor's 'iveness in a scattered, hasty man- ınd besought her to pledge herself she would never tell what she, was about to confess.

ınor, taken by surprise, gave a ıional pledge that, if the commu- ion had in it nothing wrong, she *.l keep it secret*, and then, in the *ame scattered, unconnected* manner, *the girl told Eleanor* that she was the daughter of Michael Bryan, former farm bailiff to old Mr. Coleman, whom the mistress had turned off; that it was Mr. Kent had placed her here, when she could have got no other situation.

"And, oh ma'am," she exclaimed, "maybe you or Mr. Coleman might prevent what's going to happen in this house."

Eleanor was bewildered. What possible connection could there be between the beginning of the poor girl's statement and its close?

"I am afeard, ma'am," continued Lucy, in a sobbing whisper and with a frightened look toward the door, "I am afeard, ma'am, that—that the mistress is going to marry again."

Here Eleanor checked her firmly, affected to discredit her utterly, and read the girl a brief lecture, as severely as she was able, upon her noticing what took place below stairs. All very proper and discreet, but she was secretly amazed and moved. If this were true —and, combining the story with her own observation, she almost believed it —what effect would it have upon her husband if she told him what she heard? It might be, seeing the unequivocal affection his mother felt for him, that if he were apprised of the danger in time, supposing it to exist, he might have influence enough to avert it.

The long habit of shielding him from annoyance operated powerfully upon her against this prudent course; she shrunk from it, and winced at the very thought of it. Here she had him peacefully moored after the storm, beginning to accustom himself to any little cloud of disappointment which might hang over his home, and enjoying himself entirely in her society. One word from her might break up all this peace, and throw him into a state of despondency perhaps deeper than that from which he had risen. Should she speak that word? But yet, was it not crueler far to hoodwink him, and allow the ground to be taken from under his very feet while he sat dreaming and drolling away the days with her, when a timely exertion of influence coming from him, a proper and rightful channel for such interference, might save himself and his mother from this scandal? Woe to those who say peace, peace, when there is no peace!

One morning he was reading out to her, as was his custom, and, looking up, he saw her eyes directed wistfully across the fields—ay, he followed their direction. There went the ill-matched pair down the fallow, with the startled rooks clamoring above them, and the cattle staring at them inquisitively over the neighboring hedge. He threw aside the book.

"Eleanor," he said, "this is not exactly the sort of house I should have chosen for you, and we'll take flight when once our quill-feathers are grown again. I hope you will not form any wrong impression about my mother as a hostess because this person is so privileged in the house; the fact is, he is the head man of business here; her income depends upon his management, and it is necessary to consult him from hour to hour. My mother, you are aware, is one of those who must know what is going on in her own business. She never allows herself to be mystified or set aside. I remember in some law transaction long ago how she worried her attorney out of his patience, and possibly out of his tricks, by her importunate directness and utter contempt of law phrases."

"But is it the habit, Willie, that a farm bailiff should make himself one of the family?"

"Common enough, Nell; it is found convenient. You know he's factotum and vizier upon the land; he has all the money passing through his hands; and, I think you will agree with me, the less you let such a man out of your sight the better."

"Oh! but if—" she began, and interrupted herself with "You are quite right, Will, to uphold your mother."

"But if—Nell, what were you going to say?"

"Do you know another instance of a lady a widow?"

"Why, yes. Mrs. Darron, over the hill yonder—she has a farm bailiff."

"Who comes in," continued Eleanor, pursuing a hesitating cross-examination, "when he pleases, and joins the family at their meals?"

"She has no family, Nell."

"Is she in the same station of life as we are?" asked Eleanor.

"She has the blood of four hundred acres of rich freehold farm running through her veins," replied he, smiling.

"Oh indeed! and—" faltered Eleanor.

"Go on, Nellie, I'll tell you all I know."

"Is she young?"

"Buxom thirty," he replied.

"Do people talk of her?" murmured Eleanor.

"You mean do people make a scandal of it? They certainly do not; he is a business man, and his business lies on her land; to be sure, the neighbors may hint and whisper, for all I know. It is a snug freehold, certainly. The man has opportunities, no doubt, of pushing his suit, and a good argument to back it, since no one could make a more competent master of the place."

"Would it surprise you very much?" began Eleanor.

"Not the least. Why, Eleanor, you seem curious about this Mrs. Darron. I shall show her to you next Sunday at church, with a bird of paradise on her bonnet and a gorgeous tropic shawl, if mother's account of her be correct."

"I don't care to see her, Will."

She was silent, looked up at him, and then out at the distant figures, and again up at him; but, though evidently full of some communication, and her lips just parted as if to begin, she sat quite silent.

"You mean to say, Nell, that people might talk of my mother?"

"Might! Don't you think that they surely will talk?"

"Let them," he said, shortly; and added, in a moment after, "In the first place, it is a custom of the country, this intercourse which seems to you so strange; and, in the second, she is old enough to be his—she is twice his age; that is enough to silence such insolence."

"But, surely, old people have married young people, love?" said Eleanor.

"Let them talk, let them talk, provided it be not in my presence," said he in haste. The fact is, I quite agree with you on the desirability of getting rid of this fellow out of the house, if only my mother could be influenced to do it. He has held possession these six or eight years, and she has such a high character for sense she can defy such silly rumors. Indeed, much as I m

self should wish it for your sake, Nell, I can not say I should half respect her if she got rid of him for such a reason as that."

"But have you not observed, love, something be—between—" she saw him begin to stare, and her meaning popped out with a nervous recklessness—"I think there *is* something between your mother and Mr. Kent."

He woke out of his daily apathy. In fact, he looked at her in such stern, cold amazement, that she laid her hand quickly upon his in gentle deprecation of anger.

"Nellie, for heaven's sake speak out plainly when you speak of those I love!"

"I don't wish—you *know* I don't wish to hurt your feelings, Will; but just to warn you—I *may* be mistaken, but I *do* think it better to have no secrets from you—I *do* think your mother has some thought of marrying again."

He withdrew his hand from hers and rose from his chair.

"Nellie, if any one had told me you could have repeated such gossip—such vulgar gossip—I should not have believed it; it is a disappointment and mortification to me. I distinctly state, in my mother's name, that such an assertion is groundless and silly. I did not think you were like other women in this."

His rebuke brought the tears to her eyes and sent a distressed flush to her cheek; but, as he was about to leave the room, deeply offended, she got before him to the door, and, placing her back against it, pushed him gently back with her hand upon his breast.

"It is the first time we fell out like this, Will; you have not been quite just."

"Just or not, Nell, I have no business to say what I have said to you; but you don't know how touchy I am about old mother."

'But you don't love your mother tter than me?"

; easy to make you jealous, Nell," l, laughing and kissing her, and arrel of our Darby and Joan was wn over. Not so quickly passed mortification and shock from Cole- 's mind; the cruel suggestion ruf- him anew every time it returned to memory during the day.

There is nothing too strange, or even revolting, but it may come to pass. Nine days' wonders are latterly so common, that our tympanums have grown callous, our ejaculations have become merely dramatic; the genuine wonder lasts about nine seconds. There is nothing durable, nothing holy, nothing honest, lawful, or wealthy, but that one of these days it may give us a surprise and belie itself. We can not on that account, you know, be five minutes late at our office. It is no affair of ours that the Marchioness of B—— was in the police dock for shoplifting a yard of ribbon, or that Bishop ——— has declared himself a Deist or a Mormon, or that the Prince of Bankers is picking oakum with a cropped head. We must mind to pay our grocery bill not the less, and we will enjoy our beefsteak all the same.

Coleman was pretty well world-worn, and had little trust in men or things for good or ill; but there is a sanctity about the old home faith—he still believed in the mother he had not seen for years with a tender bigotry. Like the wallflower on the rock, this fond superstition for home flourishes in the most skeptic nature, and the first suspicion which touches the dear old shrine with dishonor or doubt comes upon us like cold sacrilege. Had this story been whispered to him by any other lips than those of his wife, he would have scouted it with utter contempt, and thought no more about it; but now he grew troubled. Without any deliberate intention of espial, he caught himself noting the manner of his mother toward Kent, and marking her words uneasily; but he observed nothing sufficient to support the charge. Yet was he restless, abstracted, and altered; he no longer persevered in the squeamish duty of courtesy and forbearance toward one whose name had been, though idly, coupled so with his mother's.

Surely, thought he, what Nell has already observed the whole country must have by heart, and this absurd report must be put an end to by some decided course.

He sought an opportunity to speak to his mother without danger of interruption, and a few days after he had the chance at last. Mr. Kent had gone to a distant fair, and was not to be back till late the next day. He drew her

into the little room appropriated to Kent's desk and ledgers. Kent's pipes of many fashions, from bistre-brown to coal-black, adorned the chimney-piece; files of memorandums, bills, and letters hung on either side; his lounging arm-chair stood upon the rug responsively; the carpet up to the table was frayed by hobnailed shoes, where the workmen had come in and out. Certes, this man was an active member in the firm.

"I have seen very little of you, mother, since I came home," he began, in a tone of affectionate reproach.

"Whose fault was that, Will? You have left the mother to cleave to the wife, and I don't blame you, but you had a right to come home to me many a day ago, before it had come to this." She looked round the room from the desk to the files. Her words were equivocal to her son's ear. Before it had come to this, thought he—to ruin or bankruptcy was it, or had that look round the room a meaning?

"You will have just enough of us as it is, mother. We must have put you out a great deal; it must be a great change, this, from your daily habits—to have a noisy child in the house and a town lady—eh, mother?" smiled he.

"Lord a mercy, Will! there isn't any change in my habits these eight years, and all who belong to you will be welcome here."

He paused, rightly calculating that the direct old lady was sure to suspect some delicate motive to be guiding his conversation, and would draw it forth.

"And how do you and Eleanor find the house?" she said.

"I can assure you of this, mother, she quite appreciates the kindness of your welcome and reception."

"She does not seem to like Mr. Kent much," she continued, fixing her keen eyes upon him.

"Why, Nellie has been brought up to a town life, and is rather fastidious in her acquaintances. I can not say she likes Mr. Kent," said he, bluntly.

Far from showing any displeasure, his mother seemed gratified by the confession. Her motives, like her meaning, were seldom ambiguous, and were often only more transparent from any effort to conceal them.

"That's *right*—*that's* right, Will," *she said; "so she told* you so?"

"It's no use concealing it, mother."

"That's right. I understand plain speaking; I never hid behind a trick in my life myself. I didn't use to ask your opinion, Will, when I had made up my own mind, and I don't say I will take it now; but I wish for your honest opinion of Mr. Kent."

There was, to his fancy, something failing and pathetic in this request, that almost sounded like an appeal. For the moment it occurred to him that his mother was in fear of this man, and in this opportunity of confidence turned to him for support.

"I think Mr. Kent to be a presuming, unprincipled man, mother. I dare say he has business capabilities, but, come he of squire or of peasant, I don't believe that that man could ever form into a gentleman either in feelings, conversation, or conduct. Should he ever presume upon his privileges in your house, mother, may I depend upon your speaking freely to me and relying on me?"

She was silent and grave, but the softness had left her face. She stood up stiffly beside him, her hand outstretched along the marble of the chimney-piece. He knew this mood of old when she disagreed, or disliked the turn conversation had taken; she preserved a cold silence, and averted her eyes.

"Come, now, mother," said he, in a changed tone, pushing past the gibbing-point with self-possession, "I have a complaint and a grievance, as every man is sure to have who is treated too kindly or made too comfortable. I have come home an idle man, and I have been in harness so long, I find myself beginning to fret for want of something to do."

"Can't you take the gun, Will, and bring me home a brace of partridge, as you used to do? or we can borrow a horse for you."

"No, no, mother, it's no use concealing it; Eleanor and I feel our dependence upon you very sorely."

"I won't hear that nonsense, Will," she said, interrupting him. "I can not make you and Eleanor welcome by dearing, and cuddling, and kisses, but I tell you your presence in the house has made me feel quite young and light-hearted again; I am beginning to dote on that child, and I'll make him as hard

as a wild duck, if only his foolish mamma will keep her eyes shut."

"Now I have a proposal to make to you, mother, and don't be in too great a hurry to reject it—at least it is worth thinking of. You pay Kent a salary, I suppose, and it must draw upon your income pretty freely. I'll undertake his work. What need have you of him with your own son in the house? I understand agriculture sufficiently lang syne, and I'll look sharp after the men."

"Why, Will," said the old lady, readily, "if you don't object to the trouble, I'm sure you'll do nicely—any thing to make you content; but you must have a salary."

"Board and lodging are a salary, mother; I thank you most sincerely, and accept the post. Board and lodging, not a penny more. I accept it as your son, not as a farm bailiff," he said, smiling.

He was so proud and relieved that there was the slightest falter in his voice as he spoke. He strove to accept the concession with a matter-of-course quietude, lest he might betray himself by his eagerness and it might slip from his hands; yet he would not leave the vantage ground till he had established his position. He led her to the window, and, pointing to the blind old wall which divided the garden from the orchard—

"I'll inaugurate my authority by a little improvement: there's a pretty view to be had from these front windows if we just clear away ten yards of that grave-yard wall, and put a bit of wire fence to keep the pony from the garden."

"Do what you please, Will—any thing to make you contented at home."

"We shall all be contented and happy when we can see through that wall. Can't you see the improvement, mother?"

"Improvement in what, lad? Will make the grass grow lusher or red- the apples?" He assured her there be a beautiful view opened; they turn a paddock into a park; they have a soft green stretch from to the top of the hill, instead of that gray wall grinning in upon them gh the windows.

Set the men at it to-morrow afternoon, Will, and I'll send a note to Mr. Kent, which he'll receive the first thing when he comes back, so that will be all right." Then, slowly unloosening his arm from her waist, she added,

"I must go look after my cheese, Will, which I understand better than fine views."

With a quiet composed triumph, he went up stairs to his wife, and, making her put on her walking things, brought her out with him and told her all.

"There's a mountain-load off my mind," said he: "now we shall live in peace."

As was her nature to do, she gave with him and congratulated him, blaming herself for her silly ill-nature. All was peace, and the evening smiled up gloriously upon them from beyond the hill, turning the orchard trees into gold wicker-work; the light was playing on the river in vivid crescents and glories, as if an angel had gone down and was troubling the water.

CHAPTER VIII.

The next morning, Coleman, impatient to inaugurate himself into his new occupation, had the workmen summoned from their allotted job of laying down pipe drains in the low pasture, and announced to them, in broad, friendly Somersetshire phrase, the change which had taken place—they were henceforth to consider themselves under his authority. His mother came to the door for a moment, and bade them obey her son as they had done Mr. Kent; and the men showed unmistakable symptoms of approval. Some of them remembered him ten years ago in a fuddled, affectionate, dreamy sort of way, having lived all their lives within a hundred square acres or thereabouts, and drunk many barrels of beer since then. Change seemed pleasing to them all, as something almost equivalent to an increase of wages and general redress of wrongs. He quickly set them to their work of demolition: they got a couple of crowbars from the yard, their wheelbarrows and their shovels. It was a mild, cloudy day, and he brought his wife, with Johnnie at her skirts, to watch the effect of opening up the view. He placed a hall-chair for her at a proper distance, and there she

sat, holding the child in leash, lest some big stone might happen to light upon his inestimable little head that glittered so bonnily. She was glad, however, he should have the opportunity of gratifying his destructive bump on so fine a scale as the knocking down of a wall.

One thing amused mother and child immensely. Coleman, as is usual and necessary in an overseer of laborers in these parts, gave all his orders in the *patois* of the country, thereby saving the men the labor of brain as well as hand; and the effect was so comical to those two children, Eleanor and Johnnie, that they chorused all his broad commands with laughter. Out tinkled Johnnie's merry laugh, followed by his mother's softer laugh, half in sympathy with her pet, and half in amusement at her husband's outlandish utterance.

Meanwhile the layers of the wall went down rapidly, the wheelbarrows squeaked busily, the crowbars struck murderously, and the shovels heaved wearily at the gray *débris*. Whole routs of beetles, wood-lice, and spiders went skurrying away as their aged mossy crannies were reft asunder rudely. About midway they came upon a deserted stoat's nest, very comfortable-looking still, which produced a great impression upon Johnnie. But most impressive of all, the spacious green view began to open upon them. Coleman repeatedly called his wife's attention to it, and she appreciated it with due feminine enthusiasm.

But of a sudden there was a pause in the industry; the workmen suspended the heave of the shovels, and hung on the stroke of the crowbar. One comes striding down the steep orchard-path in velveteens and gaiters. It is Mr. Kent, with an angry streak upon his cheek and forehead.

"There be cross words toward," muttered one of the men; "look'ee how he's a cooming down on us like a train through a tunnel!"

Coleman saw him coming, and, with one foot carelessly raised on a stone and his arms crossed on his breast, he awaited the farm bailiff's approach, and nodded to him civilly as he came up.

"What the devil are you doing here, men? Who took 'ee from the fyeld?"

"It *was I who put them* here, Mr. *Kent, and I am responsible*, I suppose. You received a note from my mother to the effect that just at present she did not need your valuable services. Of course I need scarcely say, any claim you may think fair that may compensate you for such short notice will be allowed by my mother, and your business relation with her closes on the most friendly understanding. Her sole reason for the change is this—I am her nearest relation, and I have made a request to be allowed the management of the farm."

"The deuce you have! Keep your smooth speeches, sir, for your creditors; they don't go down with men who never trusted you. After eight years of my valuable services, it is not likely I should be dismissed of a morning by a bit of paper like that." He produced a folded note from his waistcoat pocket, and tossed it contemptuously toward Coleman.

"You are not dismissed, sir," replied the latter. "Put what construction pleases you upon my mother's act, the fact remains. Mrs. Coleman engages me, at my request, to undertake the management of her farm."

"Manage your printers' devils. You! you don't know a turnip from a mangold, man," laughed Kent, harshly. "I expect the farm would soon go where the newspaper has gone, and we'd have nothing left but a pair of fugitive bankrupts."

"I expected you would be impertinent, Mr. Kent, and I am prepared for it. I don't want farther words with you, and I refer you, as a business man, to my mother's note."

"Pick it up and refer to it yourself, man," cried Kent, wheeling round on the amazed workmen.

"Look 'ee yere, ye d— fools! back every man o' ye to the fyeld and finish the draining, or you'll not get a d— shilling for your day's work, unless what ye can find in this bankrupt's pocket."

Coleman lifted the note from the ground, unconscious in his anxiety of the undignified effect of the act. Armed with such a credential as his mother's written wishes, he felt that he could carry this matter with firm self-reliance. Passion is a weak thing when opposed to cool determination, and he felt all the stronger for the insult and the bluster

he sustained. It took the pain from his position; he had no more delicacy in setting the man aside.

"You'd better wait," said Coleman to the men, who seemed inclined to shrink away; "you will be safer in obeying your mistress's orders, who owns the place, and whose money you receive, than the order of this gentleman, who is no longer in her service." He opened the letter and began to read.

"Back to the fyeld wi' ye," cried Kent, "or by G— I will have every man of you turned off."

Whether it was that the firm mild English did not tell upon them, or their habitual obedience to the farm bailiff overawed them, certain it was they dropped their bristly jaws and went hulking away slowly before Kent's savage frown.

But Coleman had lost sense of what was happening as he became absorbed in that little scrap of paper in his hand; he read through it, word by word, and the color forsook his cheeks. It was his mother's unmistakable character—a round school-hand of old-fashioned capitals.

"Dear Hugh," it ran.

"My son has begged me to give him something to do on the place, as he can't bear to be idle. You won't object to his taking charge of the farm for a few months: it can make no difference between you and me, who are, as we may say, one.

"Yours affectionately,

"Martha Coleman."

Yielding to an impulse, he tore the letter across and across again, and snowed it on the gravel. Eleanor came over quickly to his side, and Kent's eyes were fixed upon them.

"Oh, you make no mistake!" cried the latter—"mind you make no mistake. If you take a high tone, I can take a higher. Whatever position you assume in this place, I'll override you easy. You call yourself master here. You may be the farm bailiff, and, by G—, I may be your master in a week!"

"You are only my mother's hind," said Coleman, unable now to control the surge of temper.

"Make no mistake," cried Kent, with a vulgar triumph; "I shall be your mother's husband, I expect, and then where are you? Oh, keep your fist below your waistcoat, sir; mine is a deal heavier!"

Coleman's hand *had* involuntarily clenched, and was drawn trembling back; but he had sufficient self-control to render needless his wife's whispered entreaty and grasp of his arms.

"I don't mean to strike him," he said. "Come with me, Eleanor; take Johnnie's hand."

He crossed the gravel without a word, and accompanied them up stairs to his room. Eleanor knew it was no moment to address him; she knew he must leave her and go down stairs to speak to his mother alone, and till that conversation had taken place there was no room for consolation.

"I don't believe it yet, Nellie; it may prove yet to be an impudent lie."

With these words he closed the door and went down direct to his mother, galled, and agitated with misgiving.

CHAPTER IX.

He found Mrs. Coleman in the little yard, superintending the packing of her cheese for town, and, turning round, she asked good-humoredly, "How went his job at the wall?" but his agitated expression caught her attention immediately, and drove the smile from her face.

He requested a few moments' private conversation with her in the house, and without a word she turned off from the cart, and walked by his side up to the hall door. He led her into the drawing-room and shut the door. He confronted her at once, and with a sternness he would fain have repressed; but his voice rung like metal; he told her what Kent had said, word for word.

"Now, mother, for those insolent falsehoods I ask and claim from you that this man should be dismissed from your service."

"He had no right to speak so to my son," said the old lady, evidently hesitating whether to brave it out or to conciliate him. "He was guilty of insolence, Will; but who told you he lied?"

"Mother, I can not believe you serious in such an answer. If he has not

lied to me, it would be simply shocking —the mere suspicion that you could so degrade yourself."

"It is true, then," said the old lady, bolting it out. "He has been my only stay and friend this many years, when my own family deserted me; he has made the place what it is, and I see nothing degrading to myself in becoming his wife. He is of as good family as your father, man. Degrading! the idea!" she cried, working herself up.

"Mother, you have deceived me."

"I never deceived you, bless you! Who are you, Will, to call your mother to account? If you had asked me, as you have done now, I should have told you outright."

"If nothing else, respect for my father's memory — a man whom all the country honored—ought to prevent you from making this monstrous match," said Coleman, hotly; but she met him in a leaden spirit of opposition.

"I owe your father nothing," she said; "your father did me a mean turn which I have not forgotten, and sha'n't forget to my dying day — your aunt Dora could tell you all about it. It's no matter—no matter; but you've minded me of a good reason for what I mean to do."

"For God's sake, what has my father done, mother, which could influence you to sacrifice yourself? I always believed that you and my father lived happily."

"Eh, dear! happily! that is the happiness. I never talk of injustice or wrongs, but I don't think of 'em the less. Not much happened since then in this quiet house to put 'em out of my mind." Then, to the cold astonishment of her son, who scarcely trusted his ears, she gave him the history, with feminine bitterness and detail, of a certain velvet mantle which her husband had long promised her, and made a deal of fuss about. She could have bought a whole wardrobe for herself, had she cared; but when he made such a fuss about this present, she took a whim for it. When it arrived she could have put a pie-dish under either shoulder, it was such an ill-fit, and she wished to have it sent back and altered.

"What think you he did, Will? He tumbled the mantle into its box, and sent it off a present to your aunt Dora, the *woman in all the world* I hate the most, and he told me to my face a few days after he had heard from her to say it was a good fit for her. I've done him many a kind turn since that, Will, and I sat up for six nights with him when he was dying without ever taking off my clothes; but I tell 'ee I was thinking of that dress when I looked from my window and saw the velvet on his hearse."

Coleman was shocked and alienated for a moment by this sudden farcical charge against his father: there was such a savage absurdity about it, and a remoteness from the point he was straining after, that it gave him a despair in all farther reasoning or entreaty. He little knew, with all his dealing among men, how fantastic is woman's wrath—how from a cause as light as air, which just touches her vanity or stings her pride, she will often delight to work out a life-long bitter result — how, though you may wrong her seventy times seven, she will bear and forbear like an angel; but affront her once, and what a spiteful cat it is! slandering, and carping, and depreciating perennially—her very praise like poisoned sweetmeats—her censure covert and incurable — she'll defame your very tombstone.

"Why, mother, if you have no respect for my father," said Coleman, sternly—"God pardon me that I must say it!—look in your glass, and for self-respect and decency sake withdraw from this marriage. You are old, and have no trace of beauty in face or figure; he is a well-favored vigorous man, younger than myself, while you are turned of sixty-three."

"That's a falsehood," cried the old lady, ruddy through every wrinkle, and sitting up erect; "you are a good five years over the mark."

He went to the shelf and took down the old family Bible, and, opening it at the fly-leaf, showed her her age, name, and date.

All of a tremble, she snatched out the tell-tale leaf and threw it in the fire.

"What want ye, what want ye? This freehold is mine, and you stand on my carpet—never let your tongue stretch farther than your arm, boy! I never asked you what wife you chose or what business you sunk your money in; and this old hand of mine is still

my own, as when I was a maid of twenty." She stretched it out like a gauntlet of defiance.

"You have answered me, mother," he said, despondingly. "You have certainly a perfect right to dispose of yourself as you please. I have now but one question to put to you, and I put it as caring for your happiness more than any one else in the world. Do you hold any tie—have you taken any legal precaution to secure this man's proper treatment of you?"

She looked at him full in the face.

"To be plain," he said, "have you made a settlement of your property?"

"Eh! I thought so," said the old lady, "and it comforts me to recollect it—you've got a personal interest in all this argument—you've a rare brazen face, Will."

"I am strong in my honesty of intention, mother, and I hold myself above suspicion. The question is one which I believe involves your safety—we won't say happiness—that is out of the question—have you secured your property?"

"Oh, you must hear all! you make a face at the dose, Will, and now you want to lick the spoon. Then I'll tell 'ee I have not made a settlement, and I won't. I'll never trust by halves; where I trust my sheep I'll trust the fleece. Look 'ee, I'm going to risk my happiness by this step—and I believe it is for my happiness—let my farm follow it. He shall not turn on me and say, 'You mistrusted me and tied my hands, so now I have the advantage of you, and I'll take it.'"

He turned slowly away from her and went downcast to the window.

"Why, Will," she said, with a wayward softness, "if I am mistaken in him now, the mistake would be so awful I can't afford to think of it or to provide for it cold-blooded—let all go when my old heart is broken. He's acted well to me. Will, these eight years; he has been ady, hearty friend, and given me advice in all my difficulties, and n me a patient ear to all my troub- —I don't tell 'em to all I meet, I mise you. You may laugh at me, ll, if you like, though you look in no *joking mood just* now, but I've a fancy *about Mr. Kent* that has maybe made a *fool of me.* I've taken a notion he's the very picture of my poor sweetheart, Edward Gardiner, forty years ago—eh, dear! the very merry blue eye and girt comely whisker—the very same happy-go-lucky manner and talk—and his laugh! if there was the ghost of a laugh as there's the ghost of a body, I would say Edward's young laugh had come back to couple with mine again."

"Mother," he said, turning toward her again, "I have now only one last plea to urge. I can not sympathize with you, or even understand your sentiments, and I have spoken harshly to you to-day, as I never thought to speak to you; but this I know—there is no suffering I would not undergo—ay, death itself—rather than ridicule or misery should fall on your gray hair; and I seem to feel that there will be scandal and misery in this business. For my sake, wait for a few months and reflect before you pledge yourself."

"Lord a mercy! I have pledged myself, and I will stand to it. Ridicule and gray hair! I don't know what you mean. I know you've roused my blood, Will, and we've both talked a deal of wild nonsense. Bless your heart, ha' done."

"Well, mother, I've done. I've only to tell you, in all kindness and sorrow, that Eleanor and I must leave the house at once; I could not have her witness this."

She made no reply, and, having waited a moment to see if she would melt to him, he went out with a despairing gesture.

Flushed with shame and emotion, he came up to his wife, and one look at his face told her all that had happened. She met him, and laid her hand on his arm, silencing him.

"Do not fret yourself to speak of it; I can guess what has happened."

"Ay; well, it is better not to speak of it; it was an unlucky day we ever started to come here."

"Was it so, love?" she said; "it was not our arrival that did the mischief."

"Nell, my poor girl, you must knock about the world with me yet a little while, but I'll find rest for you somewhere, I trust. We must leave this house."

"When must we go, love?"

"I will not leave you here another day," he said; "you shall not catch a

taint of this monstrous scandal. Ay, ay, I understand that look—you would ask me where could we go, a pauper family?"

"No, no, we both have friends, Will, who would gladly open their doors to us with welcome."

"Why, yes; and failing them," said he, with unwonted bitterness, "there is a certain fine palace—Elizabethan architecture, you know—supported by the parish, where we must live apart and dress in uniform. I vow I'd feel less shame and misery in entering the workhouse gate, than in living here with this horror coming on. We must go this evening, Nell. By heavens! I can not meet that man again."

He seized his portmanteau, opened the drawers, and, taking out his clothes, began to pack up. Eleanor sat quietly by the fire, her child standing by her knee: she let her husband run out all his reel. He laid his things in his portmanteau deliberately—always a good packer; he paid a calm attention to his task, economizing every corner of space—often taking out articles which did not fit compactly and readjusting them with care. During it all Eleanor sat watching him silently, with her hands crossed. She knew well he meant what he said, and would be like to carry out his intention even to the end, and she knew also it was less in anger now than for her sake he was taking this abrupt step.

"Will, love," she said at last, when with pressed knee he was hasping the portmanteau, "you must not leave your mother's side at such a time."

He looked up at her.

"I know you, Will," she said; "you would never forgive yourself if you deserted her: if she has cast away herself, there is all the more need of your support and your countenance."

He rose to his feet and took a turn up and down the room.

"Yes, Nell, I must remain and shut my eyes."

"Who knows, Will, but she may change if we stay? If we go she will be left to her evil genius, without one friend in the world."

"I come of an obstinate stock, Nell—no, no, my mother has committed herself to this," he said, *standing thoughtfully at the fireplace;* "she'll go through with it, she'll go through with it, depend on it: you can't change the shape of an iron cast when it has cooled in the mould. Good God! Nellie, I feel like a man in a nightmare."

"I have hopes you will wake and find it one, Will; but, if this must be, let us wait and meet it together; worse things than this have happened in families and have been lived down. As for Mr. Kent," she whispered, going up to his side affectionately, "why should *we* think of him? You and I will sit beside one another, and face it out, love, for your mother's sake."

"Nellie, Nellie, the needle always points true in your heart; I owe it to my mother to countenance her even in her madness. It may seem a boast, Nell, but I think I'd rather meet death for her sake than face that ceremony and give her away. But be I welcome here or not—be my motives suspected or understood by her—here I will stay and see it out."

He paused a while, and, with his arm round her waist, took her a turn about the room.

"The fact is, Nell, my poor mother and I used one another a little roughly down stairs, and she made some ill-considered charges; but that's all over now. You must not stay here, Nell; you and Johnnie must positively leave this; you can easily go to your sister for a month or so."

"*You* owe it to your mother, Willie, to remain, and I owe it to you. Think what a dreadful reproof it would be before all her servants—before the whole country—if you were to send me away. Don't answer me, Will, till you consider."

He thought a while; but when he spoke again his mind had wandered to his mother's situation, and he had evidently forgotten the question she had raised.

"God help her!" he said—"it is not so much now she wants my help; she is intoxicated just now by this monstrous delusion; when that forsakes her I see how it will be. God help her, then, in her desolation, if no one were near her to support her!"

"And to save her, Will," said his wife. "Remember, when she once discovers her mistake, we can take her away to live with us. You will have

many an opening for recommencing business between this and then. I can see through this evil and beyond it, love. It will be like a thunder-shower, heavy but short."

"God bless you, Nell, for reminding me of that! Ay, we'll save her before her heart is broken. This fellow only wants the place, and that will be lost to her. Well, Nell, I believe you will not leave me—be it so. You've been wiser and cooler than I've been to-day."

They went down stairs to dinner together when the bell rang, and Coleman from henceforth showed a perfect command of nerve and temper. When Eleanor was trembling that day at his side, scarce knowing where to look, he sat there grave and courteous, and spoke to his mother — to her alone — as if they had had no scene. The old lady watched him, and met his eye at first with a sort of estranged defiance on her face, but the look softened gradually in the evening. Neither Kent nor he interchanged a word; the former was dark and silent, nor did he seem altogether at his ease. He seemed to have expected another demeanor in Coleman, and was repulsed by the grave dignity opposed to him, which was not altogether within his comprehension. Some days passed, and Coleman still preserved the same manner evenly—no glimmer of heat or impatience. He had lost that Mercutio spirit, indeed. No pleasant drolleries now when alone with his wife; his face was earnest and sad, and he was scrupulously respectful toward his mother. The slight sullenness of the old lady wholly wore away; her manner acquired a low excitement—so it seemed to her watchful son—an excitement sometimes reacting into uneasy abstraction. She did not exactly seem depressed, nor even nervous, but her mind seemed to be in a silent ferment, in which, perhaps, some misgiving mingled. She never came into her son's bedroom at night, as had been her habit; she seemed to avoid him and his wife with either the sense of distrust or shame. Coleman sought an interview with her at last.

It was about eleven o'clock at night; he had heard her enter her bedroom, and in half an hour or so he followed her. He found her seated over the fire, busy with a hundred letters and scrolls; dusty files were ranged on the floors, and torn paper was blazing up the chimney. He crossed the room and took a chair by her, and she turned quickly upon him.

"If you come here to wrangle with me, Will, I tell you timely it is no use. Here is enough on my hands and mind without idle talk and ill feelings."

"There shall be no ill feelings, mother. I have only come to tell you my wife and I will remain here with you, so that we are not in the way; and if you have indeed made up your mind to this marriage, for your sake, mother, I will accompany you even to the church, and countenance your act before all the country."

She laid the letter she had been reading on the table.

"Eh, dear! those are kind words, sonny. Sit by me, sit by me—my old brain is galloping away with me to-night."

She turned to her papers again, and rustled among them busily; he saw the hectic on her old cheek, and his heart was moved. But he had said all that could be said. He did not see his way to comfort, and he felt it would be cruel and false to her to attempt any consolation.

"Will," she said abruptly, "you have promised not to desert me to-night—why did you choose this night?"

"I waited till it seemed to me that you had pardoned me, mother, for my interference."

"Why this night, Will — you have waited for this night?"

He looked at her in some perplexity.

"Why did 'ee not choose to-morrow night?"

"And I might as likely have chosen to-morrow night, mother."

"Bless you, I should have had no need of you then."

"To-morrow!" he murmured, fixing his eyes upon her in consternation.

"And if at all, why not to-morrow?" said she. "If you mean to plow the field, strike in the share afore the frost come. Will ye stan' by me to-morrow or not?"

"I will stand by you to-morrow, mother," he said, with a sudden effort of resolution. "My wife and I will stand by you and countenance you in this act, since we can not save you from it. God support you and us all to go through with it!"

He rose, and, kissing her, was going away.

"Sit by me, Will — sit by me," she said; "sit there wi'out a word for an hour or so; I can not talk to 'ee, or think or sleep."

He sat with her there for nearly an hour, listening to the rustle of the papers as she turned them over, opening and folding them with aimless industry. At length he arose, and, having advised her to lie down and take some rest, went out slowly and shut her in alone—shut her in, still fussing among those endless papers, yellow, like herself, with years.

CHAPTER X.

At seven o'clock of the November morning old Mrs. Coleman stood at her toilet-table in the half-dark room, for the marriage was to be early and private. It was a toilet to hasten over with impatience and distaste; she dared not linger upon it, for it sapped her courage. A grim, desolate toilet — a grotesque and despairing hour over an old wreck in holiday pennants — over earthiness which should have been bloom.

The sky was gray and misty, woven without seam from north to south, like the crucifixion garment—no break of blue in all its expanse. A file of wild geese streamed away in the distance, screaming and vanishing on the wind. The leafless trees without appeared to bend with age, and cough in the blast.

Gone — gone — gone — all the lusty youth and the jocund sunshine. She is battered, and worn, and loveless; and yet it all came so gradually, this haggard change, since last she made her toilet as a rosy young bride. Dear, oh dear! the hollows and the twiny sinews! Can Hugh Kent love to look on that face? she sickens at it herself. Twenty years ago or thereabouts she found the first gray hair, and then came the little seams about her mouth, and a tooth dropped out, and some years after another and another, till at last she is fallen into this ruin.

She remembers the shock she received ten or fifteen years ago, while yet to her habituated gaze in the looking-glass her face seemed to retain its youth and comeliness, when she chanced to overhear a servant talk of her as the *old mistress*—she scarcely believed the girl could be talking of her — the old mistress! She was only forty-five, and her cheeks were rosy still; but by-and-by, being a sensible, strong-natured woman, she laughed off the annoyance of the words, and put reflection from her amid the diversions of her healthy outdoor duties. Yet now and again some friendly joke of a visitor, or chance remark of a friend, meaning no offense, would allude to her declining years and her elderly appearance, till at length she took home the fact that she was growing old, and felt no pain at the familiar thought; but now the old sting, the old venom was at the long-closed wound again with redoubled virulence. See at such an epoch as this, when cheeks should be bloomiest and smiles most velvety—see what a guy she has grown!

It will not do to think much or gaze much; she must not let her faith and trust fail her now. She is carrying through this bold enterprise out of her own native energy and courage; her spirit and her pride are still young. Sympathy or support she can not claim, therefore for that which must carry her through she must seek in herself. In truth, 'tis hard to reassure herself. That smile in the glass won't do it, old woman; you sicken at the effect of that gray smile.

The fields are gray in the early light, and the sky is a windy gray; the hillside orchard is streaming with gray mist; but nothing is so dreary white as the hair she is brushing out—white and dry as fleece.

She has had a restless, feverish night —that low fever of age which does not swell the pulse, but which banishes sleep. Her face is rather more haggard and collapsed than on many another toilet she has had. On some mornings she has noted that the wrinkles about her eyes were less baggy and pucey than on others. She fancied she looked ninety years old. On this festival morning, of all mornings in the year, to show so ill and ancient! Could nothing smooth them out?

A miserable reminiscence entered her thoughts as she gazed at her reflection, which seemed scrutinizing her back again with nervous curiosity. She remembered how, when old Mrs. Madder, of Wale Close, lay dead, she had heard

that the women who laid her out kneaded down the wrinkles at either side, smoothing the yellow temples with their palms, and drawing out the shriveled parchment of the cheeks. Fitter were it for her, this poor old bride, to be making ready for that other white-robed ceremonial of dust to dust, which must come soon.

Last night in the darkness — the friendly flattering darkness—the darkness which, like death, makes beauty and lovely age alike, blotting out every seam and time-stain—she did not blush to believe he cared for her. But now, as she stood on the cold brink of this ceremony, that hovered between a farce and a tragedy, she trembled and wavered. The doubts came upon her now, as it were, in cold draughts, and her very fondness for him seemed to smite her with shame.

Well, it is late to pause; she must dress herself in her finery—trick up the hard old frame in soft satin and lace—whitewash the old sepulchre, full of all its festering memories, its pitiful vanities and weed-grown regrets. She folded her hair in uncomely trim, and covered it with a gala cap, bordered tastelessly with white lace and faded orange blossoms — those very blossoms, long preserved in her wardrobe drawer, that once, woven in bright hair, kissed her cheek—the rosy cheek of a young comely lass, that once was she; now those blossoms trembled to her poor jowled face. She is crying at some sudden thought. See the tears how they come zigzag down, and leap from cheek to chin. I fear me, no Peri would care to gather such tears as those.

She tied the broad satin strings of her cap, and strove to hide the dewlap chin with a brave large bow; she drew it this way and that, but it still looked ill-balanced and unbecoming—now meagre and crushed, now too full-blown and showy. At length she was satisfied that it seemed to sit well at last, and the lines of her face seemed softer in the oval cloud of white lace.

Why was it that she suddenly tugged this careful arrangement out of shape and threw the rumpled strings across her shoulder?

"*Let him take me* as I am," she muttered; "*I shall not* always be perked *up in this finery.* I am not too old to make him a good honest wife, if he treats me well and can care for me at my worst; and if I am befooled! — it sickens me, all this trumpery."

She turned away from her glass and her table, dragged the soft Cashmere shawl around her, and sat down, all tossed and quailing, in the arm-chair by her bed. It seemed as if a sudden paralysis of doubt had laid hold upon her.

At the door stood Eleanor, gazing at her kindly. Just the very moment is this for such a soft smile to come and persuade the poor old woman there was some one on the face of the earth to sympathize with her at such a moment.

"Let me help you to dress," said Eleanor, coming over to her. "I am said to have taste and — just a few changes; pray let me."

She took off the cap, and, without a moment's hesitation, wrapped around the old lady's passive figure the ample dressing-gown which had been thrown aside on the bed. She let down the white hair again, and by aid of brush and hairpin smoothed it into fair and seemly braids. With cunning fingers she moulded the great cap into symmetry and shape. She spanned the muscular neck on which the gray hair encroached behind with a narrow plain collar, and gently drew the drapery of the shawl into buxom fit, smoothly overlapping it, and fastening it on the breast by a handsome brooch.

"Now," she said, cheerfully, "you've grown quite young and handsome again; Willie will be proud of you."

Not one word did the old lady say from the moment Eleanor entered the room with these kind comforting falsehoods till she went out again; but once, as the young hand rested upon her shoulder, she stroked it twice or thrice with a sort of mute, half-intractable gratitude.

That morning the wedding took place at the parish church. No friends were asked, but many acquaintances dropped in to witness a gratuitous show. Rumor had long since made free with the approaching event, and no doubt they expected a treat. How will the bride conduct herself? Will she simper and toddle up to the altar with a rickety assumption of youth? Richer still, will she tremble and drop her gray eyelashes and — suffer? They were notably

disappointed: the scene was a poor one, and possessed no farcical effects.

With no stouter step or calmer front did the tall, showy bridegroom walk up the aisle than did old Mrs. Coleman. The moment had come, and she could confront it. It was no shaky, rouged old belle, this bride, upon whom the people came to stare. There was strength in her step, and strength in her broad forehead and square jaw-bone, and there was a look of almost serene simplicity, which gave her a beauty in some sort.

Her son stood near her, bearing it all; he kept his eyes upon her, and forbore from looking at Kent. He suffered a good deal, but contrived to conceal his pain decently; yet his cheeks were flaming red throughout the whole ceremony, and he clenched the altar-rails forcibly, as if by physical effort to relieve the violent repulsion within.

Well, worse experiences and deeper scandal have fallen on many a respectable household, and turned decent privacy into frightful public infamy, and they have been borne, and lived down too.

CHAPTER XI.

For a few days matters seemed going well. Eleanor watched with an unquiet curiosity for signs upon the surface of what was going on beneath. The old lady met her elate, and seemed to talk of the change in a certain tone of hyperbole, outnoising misgiving by her strong protestations that she was happy and quite content.

She had been a bounteous mistress on the occasion; she had feasted all the servants and laborers, striving, it seemed, by liberality and high cheer, to diffuse an infectious gas of happiness about her. She had a high mettle and native energy; the lot she had chosen for herself she was likely to accept, at least in seeming, with a front of resignation. But this excitement carried a foreboding with it; it was like the troubled sunshine which laughs over the kennel-stream. Yet Eleanor perceived that her husband took heart from it, and she did not disturb its returning tranquillity. Women have a nicer perception than men in catching the more delicate indications of motive. With the latter a laugh generally stands for gladness, and passes on unviséed, for what it pretends to be.

Eleanor observed, in the slight and momentary opportunities she allowed herself, that her husband's manner toward Mr. Kent was changed. It sat so strangely upon him, this altered manner, that she thought it must be ironical or assumed in ridicule; so unnatural was it, she grew fidgety—so winning and deferential was it, she scarcely knew where to look. She felt he was acting; and that uncomfortable shrinking of the nerves to which people of quick sympathies are liable overcame her as she listened. If she could believe him to be sincere! He seemed to have struck under at once and unconditionally to Mr. Kent, and seemed to volunteer a pressure of good-will and amity which was certainly not invited and met with no response. By-and-by she thought she recognized in it an anxiety under the guise of friendship, which sought to conciliate the faithless guardian of something very dear and precious—a diplomacy a little overwrought, which betrayed its employer to insulting misconstruction. It was both suspicious and ungraceful—so strange was this sudden shift of Coleman's tone from dignity and anger to watchful subserviency, timed as it was to the event which placed Kent as master of the house and land.

During these times the whole household seemed on an unnatural stretch and strain, as if some melancholy anticlimax was at hand. One member in it alone was quite undisguised, and displayed his own jaunty individuality without restraint. Mr. Kent had by this time two hunters in his stable, shrewd bargains each. He had been at two meets of the foxhounds in new pink, and he rode like a beggar on horseback at timber or water. He had engaged a farm bailiff to mind the farm, and to insert himself into his own old chrysalis, while he—Hugh Kent—voyaged away on his butterfly wings. He was from home two consecutive days, and came back blooming; you could hear his loud irreverent laugh startling the house at midnight, and suggestive of recent good cheer.

It was a terrible thing to one trembling up stairs for his mother's sake

hear that hale, big-chested laugh, which seemed to blaspheme against every tie and duty. It seemed to give no hope —young wood must warp from the old; there was a startling want of keeping in that peal of heartless mirth with the old trembling tones which followed it of his mother remonstrating below. His heart ached to hear them.

Eleanor, by his desire, lived very much in her own room after the marriage, except during meals, and the old lady did not take it amiss. Whenever she met her she greeted her in a friendly manner, without complaint or comment. The child was withdrawn from his ancient ally, and no longer followed her through the fields. "Granny had no time to attend to him now," said Eleanor, and he was bribed and caressed to forget her and stay with mamma.

But it was necessary that the child should have some one who, during the early hours of the day, when she could not leave her husband, might exercise him in the fields.

She remembered the pretty interesting maid whose services had been offered to her, and which she had so sparingly accepted. She had her summoned to the little sitting-room that was private to herself. Lucy came in with the same triste, half-frightened look, and stood at the door coloring.

Eleanor remarked her expression with a sense of distress, and looked earnestly into the girl's pale, conscious face, feeling a wish to come at her trouble.

"Are you fond of children, Lucy?"

"I dearly love him, ma'am," with hasty emphasis and downcast eyes.

"Have you been long with Mrs. Coleman, Lucy?"

"These two years, ma'am."

"You've been in place before?" said Eleanor, guessing the girl at about her own age.

Lucy shook her head, but said nothing.

"Had you no trade? You did those e jobs for me so nicely, I am sure understand gloving."

Yes, ma'am, I worked at gloving e I was a child; every girl about understands it, and troubles very e if she lose a place as servant."

Eleanor drew her out on this subject, inquiring how much she used to make a week, if the demand was steady, and so forth; then she asked at random, in the same kind spirit, "Perhaps you do not like your place here? Are you afraid of Mrs. Kent?"

The girl's lips pursed up as if she were about to cry. Eleanor bade the child run up to her room to see if there were a mouse in the trap, and no sooner was he gone than she again addressed the embarrassed girl, who seemed standing there for judgment rather than for comfort.

"If you tell me what it is, Lucy, perhaps I could set it all right—I'm sure I could."

"I dursn't—oh, I dursn't, ma'am! Don't ask me, for pity's sake!"

"Never mind, then," said Eleanor; "only remember, if you want a friend, you'll find one in me; and if you take courage any time to tell me what grieves and frightens you, it shall be in the strictest confidence, and I will give you my best advice."

She then turned away to other matters—was there any infectious disease in the neighborhood? were there any children about the place? and would Lucy mind taking Master Johnnie a walk in the fields, and would she keep him away from all strange children? The girl undertook the duty with a zeal suggestive of relief, and, having assisted in putting on the child's things, took him away.

Eleanor had, as we have said, been rather perplexed as to this girl's use in such a plain establishment; the old lady had no need of such a maid, the waiting at table being performed by a girl from the Union; the amount of needlework to be done in the house was trifling, and could never have rendered necessary such a supernumerary.

She spoke to her husband upon her perplexity, telling him she had taken a sort of interest in the girl, and was troubled by her unhappy face. But he was able to tell her nothing new. She was Michael Bryan's daughter, and it seemed that Mr. Kent had obtained her her present situation. Her unhappy expression might arise from a threatening of consumption; he had met her out of doors a few minutes ago, and she seemed quite gay.

"Mamma," said Johnnie, who presently came in from his play, "mamma, what did Lucy mean when we were

gathering cock and hen grasses in the field—she caught my head between her hands and began to cry, and said she had another little darling just my age, and as pretty as me?"

Eleanor's smile vanished, and she looked up at her husband. She did not know what Lucy meant, and she thought it was better not to know.

It was altogether a strange and sinister home to which they had come.

But sterner revelations soon put such petty mysteries out of Eleanor's thoughts. A change seemed to have come over the old lady. Her dramatic joy had risen and vanished, even as those censers of colored light which flare up fitfully in the theatres and die. She no longer walked afield in the fresh air, but would shut herself up for whole afternoons in her room, till Kent came swaggering in below, and then she used to go down and meet him, addressing him in strong deprecation till silenced by a sneer or a jest.

"Will," said Eleanor, "we ought not to leave your mother all alone."

"Don't notice her," he replied, "as long as she can keep up appearances; we are bound to respect her mortification—my time will come yet. Oh Nellie, Nellie!" he continued, his voice all a tremble with emotion, "if you knew what I feel when I hear my mother's voice down there breaking already! I was deceived for the first few days, but it's no use skinning over a mortal sore like this. It's a horrible business, and we've not seen the worst. That poor old woman, whom I love and revere in a way I can not explain, she's the scoff of the country, and the slave of that insolent scoundrel, who will make a beggar of her and break her heart. 'Tis not well, Nellie—I tell you it is *not* well—to see a woman of her active, sturdy habits moping in her room and muttering to the walls. I've been trying to stave off this. I've been smiling and bowing him in and out like a lackey. The time is almost come to interfere. I'll give him a surprise," he added, with abrupt and undignified violence. "I'll tear his tongue out before he dares to insult my mother."

"Hush! Willie, before the child," whispered Eleanor, startled; and, after a few minutes' silence, he recovered his self-control.

"Willie," she said, when the moment was ripe, "I have a letter to show you which has put me in great heart. You must know that, without telling you one word, lest you might turn mutinous, I wrote a few days ago a long and most eloquent appeal to Mr. Baggot, my trustee, telling him precisely the position we were in, and entreating him to let us have £500 of my money. You know his heart was like the nether millstone," she said, smiling, "when we applied to him before; now look what a kind answer I received this morning. He says if any of your business friends will go security that neither he nor Mr. Collis shall ever be made liable, he will consent to let us have the money; see what eloquence does. Now, Willie, if things go much farther as they are going, we will bring your mother away with us, and take that little villa outside Brighton we used to summer in, and be as happy as the day is long."

She placed the letter in his hands, and he read it silently through. As we have said, he was not generally demonstrative, notwithstanding his late burst of violence, which arose from a long-sustained contortion of mind, and now he only said,

"It looks likely, Nellie; we should have some friends in London who would trust me so far. You see they know I am honest; but there is, of course, the distant danger that Master Johnnie might rise up in judgment and claim the money. However, I will write to two or three to-day—we can not afford to be proud just now."

She never needed thanks; she saw he had taken hope, and that it would work within him like leaven, so she was content.

"And now, go tell the good news to your mother," said Eleanor.

He went unhesitatingly; "sufficient unto the day would be the evil" if this sudden hope should end in disappointment. As usual, she was moping in her room, gazing out of the window with leaden eyes and hooped back. So he brought a chair beside her and sat by her.

"Mother," he said, "you are not happy."

She still looked abroad as she replied, "I did not look for happiness, Will."

"Mother," he continued, "would ye

object to leave this house, should matters not mend? I expect to have a large sum of money in a few days, and you might leave this house with Eleanor, the child, and me."

"Bless you, never mind for money," she muttered, still looking abroad; "I ha' got money; don't let that trouble you; bide ye all here wi' me."

"We are not going, mother," he said, "unless you can come with us; and why should you remain in this house to be insulted?"

"I am mistress here," said the old lady, slowly turning upon him her pale face. "He thinks he has put you out of the nest. Will, do not trouble about it; I have a feathered corner for you yet, dear heart! keep kind to me, Will; 'tis worth your while not to desert me; I can afford to pay for kindness."

"But, you know, mother," reasoned Coleman, "this place passed into the hands of Kent when you became his wife; he can turn me out at any moment."

"He dare not," she said, angrily; "this is my house: you, and Eleanor, and Johnnie shall live here, and shall be welcome till my death."

"We shall have no peace here, mother; neither you nor I can ever be happy here."

"And I care not when that may be," she said, alluding to her own words about her death, "but for you and Johnnie, Will—I care not when that will be. It is worth your pains, dearie, to be kind to me. I tell 'ee I've laid by a penny against the rainy day which nobody knows of; I have something in my pocket for Johnnie when I die, and you'll all be wise to stick by me."

He saw it was vain to catch her attention, and, confident that when once he had the means to depart he could easily induce her to accompany them, he dropped the subject for the present, and rejoined his wife.

Eleanor, as before mentioned, had a confirmed habit of sitting up late at night, seldom putting out her candle till near one o'clock. She occupied herself in writing letters, mending socks, and making dresses for Johnnie when alone, but too often, not content with raking herself, she kept her husband from his natural rest, and had him to draw his chair over to the fire to talk with her pleasantly over times past and to come. Sitting sometimes on his knees the while, with her pretty head upon his shoulder, she listened to him, her eyes looking into his, or crouched upon the hearth-rug, and leaning over against him, his hand in hers, till he began to give way to drowsy owlish nods at nothing, and dropped to sleep midway in their random talk. If he was in bed before her it availed him little; she became so industrious when alone, moving about the room like a troubled sprite, putting up a screen between Johnnie's bed and the door, and very likely upsetting it with the tail of her dressing-gown as she was stealing tiptoe away, flapping a towel unthinkingly with a stroke like a swan's wing, or trying to hammer tacks into the window-sash without noise, in some contrivance to keep out the draught from her husband's head, or, finally, putting up a shade between her husband's eyes and the candle-light, lest the glare might awaken him, and then asking him in a whisper if he were still awake, thereby doing the precise mischief she was trying to prevent. Do not despise her; you have seen she was as wise as Solon when trouble came.

Since the marriage of his mother, however, Coleman, being restless and painfully on the alert lest some mischance might befall his mother, or some need of protection arise when her belated husband came home at night, was effectually robbed of sleep. He used to lie with strained, half-raised neck on the pillow, listening for the sound of the latch, and then for high words. At length he wisely sat up with his wife over the fire, abstracted and silent enough, but well awake, and she used to reason with him about their approaching deliverance — why the expected answers from his friends had been hitherto delayed—how they must come soon—how they must necessarily be satisfactory — and how readily his mother would join their plans—woman's reasoning, you know, circumventing him and blinding him — coming round to the premise again, while he was handling a conclusion. Yet she filled up the links pretty well for all that—a soft coil here and a brave word there, and a witching persuasion running through it all. Coleman was pre-

cisely in that position in which talk becomes important, for he lived here tied hand and foot; there was absolutely no move on the board for him. He winced to think of those unanswered applications to his friends, and yet he could not stoop to any notice of their discreet neglect; the slightest act on his part might destroy the poise in which matters were sustained, and force him to some desperate course.

Kent did not return on the night of his interview with his mother, and the next morning, on Coleman's suggestion, his wife came down with him to breakfast with the old lady. Mrs. Kent was down before them; her back was to them as they came in, and she did not turn to him at his hearty greeting: she stood with her head bent forward till her forehead pressed the marble—stood there doing nothing. The breakfast things were on the table, but there was no preparation for breakfast; the old mistress seemed lost in some doldrum upon her hearth-rug, while the kettle boiled over and the toast was in cinders. He came quickly to her side, and perceived she held an open letter in her hand.

"Will," she said, turning to him, and catching at his coat as he was stooping to kiss her, "he is drawing my—he will draw all my money. Follow him. Go to the bank, Will, and stop it, dear heart! We shall all be broken and ruined if you can not stop it."

He took the letter from her hands and read it. It was a civil communication from the manager of Wells Bank, informing her that Mr. Kent had already spent so much, and was about to draw all the capital she had lodged.

"We can not stop it, mother; that money is lost. All I have to hope is this, we may make it the means of some compromise. Suppose, now, we give him up this money, which the law has enabled him to seize, and pay him the rents of the land, provided he leaves us unmolested here—would you agree to this?" he said, seizing the opening for some decided act.

"How can he have my money—my own money," she cried, waking from her apathy—"money I have saved from day to day and year to year? That ain't law—*I don't believe it.* He may *have right to the land,* because I was an old silly and left it to his mercy, but he shall not touch the only provision I have left for my age and for those of my own blood."

"My dear mother, Eleanor and I can give you a home for your age—don't fear that; and we expected nothing from you. But, unless under certain conditions which do not exist, the law makes over all your disengaged property to him."

"Listen to me, Will—I make over every penny of it to you and Johnnie, just to give me what I eat and drink; but only go to the bank to-day and save it," she said, still clutching his arm.

"I shall go, mother, as you wish it, but it is useless."

"Do you hear me?" she cried; "I make over the money to you, and Eleanor, and her darling child. Can't you tell the manager it's your's? There!"

"You can not make it over, mother; the money is Mr. Kent's by law. Do not deceive yourself."

"How could there be such a law—such a monstrous cheat as that?" cried the old lady, all her wits alive. "Is a wife to have no more rights than a black negro? Are all her rights and liberty she enjoyed as a free Christian woman suddenly to cease when she marries a toad like that? I don't believe it."

He reasoned with her in vain. Did she not earn every penny of it? Did she not place it there in her own name? Could a leaf of a prayer-book suddenly strip her of all right to any thing of her own?

"Ain't I as good as him in blood, in pride, and in sense?" she cried. "Don't I wan't it more because I am a weak old woman? Ain't a woman at the head of us all? I'll not believe such law."

What the incensed old lady was striving to say is this: Is not a woman weaker and more liable to every wrong and oppression? How could there be a law, instead of helping her and protecting her, that puts all the power into the hands of a bully or a ruffian, instead of throwing some little balance into the weaker side? and yet women have proved themselves as good as men in intellect and courage, and the head of the state is a woman.

I am not her champion, only her interpreter.

"Well, mother, I shall start after breakfast for Wells; you must write a line to the manager, so as to empower me to speak to him. We may throw a little obstruction in his way, at least."

She got her paper, and pen and ink, and wrote her instructions hotly off, and he then persuaded her to sit down and eat something, Eleanor having meanwhile made breakfast. By the evening he said he would have news for her, but meantime the subject had better rest. Immediately after breakfast he started for Wells.

Upon the previous morning Kent also had driven to Wells in his new dog-cart — upon business, he averred — more probably, however, having a full purse awaiting him, the man went to enjoy himself, and indulge his enfranchised tastes. Perhaps, seeing he had paid so dear for the manumission from poverty, he could not have done better.

At midday he returned with a brandy blossom on his nose, and another on his forehead, a little inflamed by the pressure of his stout wideawake. Eleanor, sitting in her bedroom window, watched him dismount from the vehicle, which careened on its wheels from his weight. He stood upon the steps for a moment watching his young groom lead the horse away to the stable by the entrance gate, and then he entered the hall door. She listened for Mrs. Kent's voice, which she had heard but lately in the hall, but she only heard Kent's light-hearted lilt as he entered, and his voice calling genially to Lucy—in whose care she had left Johnnie—to bring him some lunch.

"If he would only stay away," murmured Eleanor, "and Mrs. Kent would only be wise enough to keep out of his way, all might go smoothly for a while."

Johnnie was down in the sitting-room with Lucy, and his mother had been listening to his laugh as if it had been a pleasant tune, when her attention was attracted by Mr. Kent's laugh in the hall—quite another sort of note was that. She heard the hall door open, and saw him cross the gravel and enter the orchard gate, smiling as he brushed the crumbs of his late refreshment off his whiskers and coat.

He had scarcely turned the corner out of sight, when suddenly a woman's scream arose below, and was reiterated louder and shriller—cries of pain, broken supplications for mercy. Eleanor started up and ran to the door; she heard her child's terrified voice calling her, his agitated little steps coming to her.

"Mamma, mamma, come down; granny is killing Lucy!"

She bade the child wait for her in her room, and ran breathlessly down stairs. The cries proceeded from the sitting-room, and the door was ajar. In great agitation, she rushed in without thought, and found wild work going on there.

There was old Mrs. Kent in disheveled wrath, holding the girl Lucy with one arm against a chair, and mercilessly flogging her across neck, and cheek, and shoulders with a stout riding-whip.

"Oh, Mrs. Coleman," screamed the poor girl, "save me! she will kill me—she don't know my state—she will kill me!"

Eleanor flew to the old lady's side and grasped her descending arm with her two hands.

"Mrs. Kent, what are you doing? Mrs. Kent, you must not beat the poor girl; how can you be so cruel?"

The old lady paused, breathless from her exertions, and turned her face toward Eleanor, still working, and white with its recent fury.

"I'll give it her while I can stand over her—I'll give it her! you don't know any thing, bless you—you don't know what she has been guilty of."

"Lucy, go up stairs," cried Eleanor; "don't speak just now; go up to Master Johnnie in my room."

She compassionately helped the staggering girl to the door, and closed it after her. Then she turned to Mrs. Kent once again, and asked her what had happened that could make her act so cruelly.

"No matter—that's my affair. I'll act for myself in future; I get no good telling my wrongs to others; I'll take the matter in my own hands, I will. That impudent wench shall leave the house within an hour."

Eleanor remonstrated still, and tried to come at an explanation of the girl's offense.

"I tell 'ee I'm mistress here yet, and I'll take no insults standing on my own floor; I'll pack off that wench within the hour."

She went out to the yard, and Eleanor could hear her giving directions to one of the men to put a working-horse to the cheese-cart, and lay in some straw, and bring it immediately to the back door; he must drive Lucy Bryan home.

Feeling it would be useless to spend farther entreaty upon her mother-in-law in this hard, implacable mood, she hastened up to her own room, and found poor moaning Lucy sitting near the door, miserably propped against the wall, with the weals across her swollen cheek. Right in the centre of the room stood the child, gazing at her through his tears in shy, helpless compassion.

Eleanor never put a question. With tact and unadulterated pity she left her alone, that she might tell the story of her trouble if she pleased, or keep it if she pleased; but with the eloquence of gentle touches she began to steep the poor throbbing face with water and vinegar.

"You are going to your father to-day, Lucy, and perhaps it will be better."

"I can not return to my father, ma'am; I must go to hospital," sobbed the girl.

Eleanor looked at her wistfully for a few seconds, and then said gently, "I will arrange it so."

She added again very impressively:

"Now, remember this, Lucy — any thing Mr. Coleman or I can do for you in your trouble, only tell us, and we will do it. If you can not return to your father on account of any quarrel, get a lodging in Wells till you are able for service again, and keep your wages unbroken. Mr. Coleman will settle any expenses you are put to, and we shall not lose sight of you till you get a place."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Coleman, thank you; I'll never take a place again, and I'd rather go to hospital at once, where poor friendless folk like me may hide. I never met (sobbing and crying afresh)—I never met so—so kind a lady as you."

"I only wish, Lucy, you put it in my power to be kind to you," said Eleanor, affected.

"I will, ma'am, I will: you could do one thing for me," said the girl, in a faltering whisper.

Eleanor stooped forward, and let her hand rest in the water, that she might catch the request, it was put so timidly and so low.

"If news comes to you, my dear lady, that I am like not to do well, there's a widow woman over by Pow Hill, called Mrs. Cammer — any one in the street knows where she lives—send and tell her, my dear lady, to lose no time, but come to me with—with a darling little girl I love—that will be all. God'll bless you if you do that for a poor friendless mother."

"I'll do it," said Eleanor, and she went on steeping with the eloquence of soft touches—ay, and of tears.

Presently the cook came up stairs and knocked at the door.

"Please, ma'am, the cart is ready for the young 'ooman," she said, in a hard voice; "she must go pack her box."

Lucy rose feebly. She kissed the shrinking hand of her comforter, who nevertheless accompanied her to the door.

There stood the cook, prim, reserved, and cruel, her hands crossed upon her apron and her chin carried high.

When Eleanor saw that look, she resolved what to do on an impulse. Down stairs she went by Lucy's side to the hall, and down stairs again to the girl's little room, supporting her, and followed by the astonished cook.

Well she assisted the poor weak creature with hand and heart; she got her wages for her from the old lady, who paid up to the end of the quarter, and, unperceived by Lucy, she added to them all the money she had about her, which was like sharing her last loaf with her. She put her own comfortable winter cloak, wool-lined, around the girl's shoulders, as she sat in mournful abstraction, and bade her keep it for her sake; and then, knowing the weight and importance of last looks to the sorrowful, as the girl turned round to bless her, she gave her such a kind, hearty smile, and said all would go well — with God's help, all would turn out well.

The cart trundled away from the yard and down the road, and Eleanor went back into the house with a long sigh to await her husband's return in her own room.

To his mother's inquiries, the child told out the simple truth of what he had seen. "Mr. Kent," he said, "

Lucy and he were playing in the little room below, had stroked Johnnie's head, and given him his whip to play with; then he stood with his arm round Lucy's waist—just as papa stands with you, mamma—so I brought granny in to see him in fun."

Late in the afternoon her husband returned.

"Will," she said, hastily getting up to meet him as he entered the room, "have you seen your mother since you came home?"

"Yes," said he, reflecting her anxiety. "Has any thing unpleasant happened?" She told him the occurrence of the day, the statement of the girl to her, and her own irresistible conclusion.

"What you tell me, Nellie, is very painful; the discovery comes late. If we had made it a few weeks ago, my poor mother might have been saved."

"Why should it not save her now, Will? There is surely ground enough for an immediate separation, and you must get an answer to some of your letters to-morrow."

He did not catch what she said at the moment, for a sudden misgiving had seized and confused him. Suppose some public inquiry were to arise from the ill usage the girl had sustained, and his mother's name were brought before the town on the police sheets! He was in a cold sweat at the thought.

He put some hasty questions to his wife: Was the girl much disfigured? Did she seem vindictive? Was she apparently better when she was going away?

"Your mother is quite safe, love," said Eleanor, understanding his apprehension in a moment; "the poor creature told me she would never tell any one what had happened, and would explain it in some other way."

"Thank God," said he, shortly.

"She does not wish to have it known where she is going," continued Eleanor, "so you must not let Mr. Kent or your mother know it. The man who drove her was to set her down not far from the hospital, and she meant to walk to the gate. She said she knew one of the doctors of the hospital, a good-natured young man, who would get her admitted at once."

"*Listen!*" he said, interrupting her and laying his hand upon her shoulder: "that's Kent's voice in the hall."

He went out to the head of the stairs, his wife following him closely, and they stood there in suspense. Down in the open echoing hall, where the sounds of the quarrel must be audible to the whole house, stood Kent and the old lady. She had met him at the door as he came in, and it was her voice that rose so sharply in biting Somersetshire.

"I know ye—I know ye now—I never trust twice. I'd rather ye struck me, Kent, than serve me a trick. Had ye any thing to complain of? What were you before I made you master here?"

"No matter; I am master here, and I mean to be so," replied the other, rudely and harshly; "I've plenty to complain of. I'll have none of your jealousy here—it don't become you; and I tell you this—if I'd been in the house when you beat that poor sickly wench, I'd ha' given you a cure for the rheumatism. Let's have none of your jealousy here."

"Keep what money you have taken, Kent, but sit you down content with your robbery; you shall not touch another pound. I tell 'ee, I'll spend it all upon the lawyers rather than let 'ee touch it. I trusted 'ee, and left this place in your power; and if ye'd asked me frankly and honestly at that time, I don't know what I could have refused you in my folly. I've not deserved this from you."

"Not you, bless your old soul and body! not you. Come, tell me sharp, where did you send that poor girl?"

"Eh, man! I *have* deserved it, and a deal more," cried the old lady, her passion tiding over him, "that I could have been such a wicked old silly as to deliver myself over to such as you—to take my freedom from myself, and this property from my dear kind son, and give 'em to *you*. But I've one left who'll take my part. Don't 'ee dare to touch my money. There's one who will stand between me and you if you dare to insult me or ruin me."

"If you've any regard, old lady, for his neck, you'd better drag in no third party between you and me. However I may feel myself bound to endure you, because I can indemnify myself for the nuisance," cried he, in a tone of high

irritation, "I'll stand no go-between. I'll not have a loud voice in this house but my own. He can look sweet enough when it's his interest; I'll promise ye he knows who's master here better than you. And you make no mistake—that money is mine. I'm not going to be such a fool, mind ye, as not to know my own when I have it."

"I will not have it touched," cried the old lady, with a crane note. "Recollect yourself, sir—you have a brazen face to tell me so—that money was—"

"D—n your money!" cutting her short; "it's not that I've got to speak about. You've come at part truth about me by your spying and your jealousy, and now ye shall have the whole truth before I leave the house."

Here he countered her attack with a cruel taunting confession, which ought never to have been made to a wife, and, when made, can never be expiated. Instantly there fell a dignity and reserve into the old woman's voice which it lacked before.

"On such a subject I have nothing to say," she returned, and she began to ascend the stairs slowly. "You have done me wrong enough, Kent, but the greatest wrong ye can do me is to talk of that to me."

She came up stairs with a step touched with almost decrepitude. Again the loud coarse voice assailed her from the hall. He had followed her to the foot of the stairs, so that all the house could hear him as he rung out a threat, and, in his inconsiderate wrath, an insulting allusion to her rheumatism and gray hair. She went on ascending, stooping a little under the insult and threat. Some one rushed past her: there was a moment's struggle—a heavy blow behind her—and Kent was flung abroad on his back in the hall.

"How dare you insult my mother?" said Coleman, in a choking voice, as he stood above him. The whole place was public in a moment: like rabbits popping out at dusk, all the servants were gathered in the hall, the women peeping out of the rooms, the men standing forward half resolved to interfere lest murder might be done; Eleanor standing between, holding her husband tightly, ready to restrain him or shield him in the courage of a woman's unselfish terror; midway on the stairs stood the old lady, avenged and erect, her hand on the banisters; and Johnnie was crying from the landing.

CHAPTER XII.

Kent rose to his feet shaken and confused by his heavy fall. He put his hand to his head and glared round him with a sort of stupefied anger, till his eye fastened upon Coleman, who was just turning away to go up stairs with his wife and mother. At first he seemed inclined to retort with personal violence, but Abraham the coachman and Simon the groom held him back.

"You cut up rough!" cried he, with a blasphemy; "so this is the sort you are: if I had not you in my power, d—n you, I'd break your neck."

Coleman made no answer, but, perceiving that his mother inclined to linger, pressed her on before him step by step.

"Well," shouted Kent after him, "I understand how to deal with a bully better than a sneak. By G—, I'll sue you for board and lodging!"

With this threat, peculiarly adapted to the appreciation of his audience of servants, he picked up his hat and went out, pulling the hall door after him with a passionate bang.

They stood huddled together, the cook and the kitchen-maid, the coachman and the groom, whispering and balancing whose side they would espouse—how much it might cost them to courtesy or lout to Mr. Coleman when they met him next, and if it were not advisable to be insolent to the old mistress previous to her approaching abdication, since Mr. Kent was master here. Abraham confidentially announced to all whom it might concern that upon battery and assault, such as they had witnessed, Mr. Kent would be like to turn the old lady and all her following out on the street. He would be supported by law, and it would be a "reet good job." The cook declared that Mr. Coleman was as likely a man to drop a bolus of poison into a glass o' wine or pot o' tay as she ever met. Lor! he was so sweet and smooth this time back, and look'ee how deadly he breaks out afore one can wink their eye.

"The ould mistress will come off the worst betwixt them," said the 'prentice girl; "she hasn't a poor sick wench to deal wi' now. Mr. Kent knows how to manage her, he does; and I expect she'll keep her room for a spell."

She had scarcely spoken when old Mrs. Coleman came down stairs again, and stood in the hall with them. The 'prentice girl slunk back in sudden bodily affright at the stern old face; the cook courtesied and began to retreat; the coachman muttered some apology or humble condolence; but the old lady passed them by, and, going over to the hall door, turned the large key in it with a wrench, fastened the chain, and drew the bolts. The action had a significance.

Meanwhile Mr. Kent proceeded straight to the stables, sent for Simon the groom, and bade him tackle his cob to the dog-cart. While the man was employed in bringing out the horse and fastening the buckles of the harness, Kent chose him as his confidant for lack of a better, and, giving vent to his rage, announced in short sentences, every now and then highly seasoned with curses, that Coleman and his wife had been living on them, but he would make them pay for every dinner they had eaten since he was master here; he'd turn the bankrupt out on the world—a fellow that came to eat the bread of charity, and so on; to all which menace and abuse the sycophant Simon listened with murmured approval. As he placed the reins in Kent's hands, he inquired, touching his cap, "Whether his master intended purchasing the horse from my lord?"

"Ay," said the other, with a harsh laugh; "if he cost me five hundred I'd have him."

"When may I expect you home, master?"

"What's that to you? Lead her out, and open the gate. I'll give no man an account of either my time or my money. Mind'ee, Simon, tell me how that bankrupt looks when he's served with a writ for board and lodging."

He was now upon the road, and, with a cut of his whip, he dashed off, whirling round the corner into the high road, and was soon lost to sight.

The groom was a bandy-legged, pug-nosed man, freckled like a custard. He stood in the middle of the road, watching his new master as long as he could see him, and then he turned slowly back to the house to his supper, gratified and proud, promising himself promotion, sport, and plunder from the revolution that was at hand. He had been kept at a stern distance by Mr. Coleman, and feared him; now he shared in Kent's triumph.

Far in that night Coleman and his wife sat over the fire in their bedroom. It was low and choked with ashes; they had forgotten it in their talk. Johnnie was asleep, and his little breath rose and fell audibly, checked at moments by an unquiet mutter when the deep voice of his father broke through his dreams, as in anger. There came a knock to the door. Eleanor arose to see who was there, but before she could get over it opened slowly, and old Mrs. Kent stood with them in the room. She had no candle, and seemed to have forgotten to take one. She was wrapped in her befrilled dressing-gown, shroud-white. Over she came with a look of blank unhappiness fixed upon her son. Ay, she had found out who loved her at last. And she sat herself beside him in Eleanor's vacant chair.

He put a stanch arm round her waist, and mustered all his cheerfulness. "She was now installed," said he, "one of the select committee who sat up during the small hours every night. We'll always have a chair for you, mother, and you shall be president of our debates." She looked round at him again blankly, and was about to say something, but Eleanor's dress rustled beside her and caught her ear. She turned quickly round with impatience; the pretty innocent face of Eleanor softened her in a moment, and she kindly patted her hand.

"How is Johnnie all these times, dearie?" she said aloud.

"He is asleep, mother; he is so restless to-night."

"Poor little sonnie!" whispered the old lady, catching a plaintive tone from Eleanor. "Poor little sonnie! his cot within looks so empty."

When she had spoken thus, she sat down without a word, looking into the fire, and seeming not to catch the drift of what was said to her. In an hour

or so she said to her son, and repeated it once or twice, as if the sentence satisfied her and expressed her mind,

"Will, you should have come home long ere now."

Then she rose, and went over to Johnnie's little bed, her shadow falling over him as she bent above him. She never kissed him or touched him, but she gazed down upon him full five minutes, and, taking the candle Eleanor put into her hand, went out. Coleman would have followed her to see her to her room, but she put him back, shaking her old white head mournfully.

"No—no—no. I'm a fool, Will—no fool like an old fool; there's no more to be said about that now. Good-night, dear boy."

Again the next night, at the same still hour, there came the knock to the door, and the visitation was again repeated.

"What of Johnnie?" she said aloud; "how is the dear child?" and again catching Eleanor's infectious whisper, she added, "Eh, dear! that little cot is looking lone in my room to-night."

Eleanor was smitten with a little temporary deafness. She lifted over the arm-chair from the bedside, and whispered to her husband to stir up the fire, which on this occasion had been better tended, and was clear and red. The old lady sat down beside her son, still loth to talk, and content to be beside him. At length Coleman yielded to her mood, after many efforts to cheer her. The child's breathings grew regular and undisturbed, and Eleanor fancied that granny was listening to them, like herself, as the old woman gazed blankly into the fire. There was a mild power, too, in that spacious white face looking at the embers—a power in its very inert muteness. It reminded her, as the glow of the fire lay on it, of the sphinx, with just a red memory of sunset on its forehead.

At one o'clock the old lady rose to go, and yet stood wavering and looking over at the little bed where lay the young face, with its lips parted, as if it were breaking into singing; one long look at it, and then she went lingeringly away.

"She covets the company of that child, *Nellie; I can see it plainly working in her mind.*"

The next morning Coleman waited till his wife had brushed her little son's hair and made him tidy; he then took the little fellow by the hand, and led him to his mother's room door. Opening it, he sent him running in, and stood without to listen. He knew his mother was alone, and he wished to hear if the child could elicit from her the old natural voice.

"Lor a mercy!" came the blithe old voice, just as of old, "here's my darling pet come to see me."

Coleman's heart warmed as the charm worked of the child's innocent prattle. The old mother thawed from her frigid unnatural mood; so he returned to his wife smiling, and told her of his success.

"But at night, Will—at night, Will," moaned Eleanor, "if you hear the slightest disturbance, promise me you will go in and fetch him away."

The pledge was given, and she was fain to be content; so Johnnie followed granny about as before, and she paid an unexpected visit to the kitchen in his company, and they even hovered into the yard and back again. At night Johnnie said his prayers at his mother's knee down stairs, and then he was given in charge to granny, who looked like a monstrous white owl conveying him away in her plumage of frills. The child was once more installed in his swinging cot.

Coleman took this opportunity, while her heart seemed soft, of inducing her to make some preparations for their departure, now resolved upon by Eleanor and himself. The means indeed were still wanting, though each morning he longed for the post-hour, and grew restless till it was past, sometimes holding the letter in his morning dreams, and awaking to find himself powerless still, with nothing to fall back upon but Eleanor's specious assurances.

To his mother he assumed a confidence and a certainty in his expectations; and, feeling that now was his time to influence her, he induced her to pull out the old trunk, rust-eaten and stained from disuse, and begin to put away her clothes for a journey. Her gray gown went in, and her linsey-woolsey.

"And here, mother, is the cap you wore when I came home; you must wear it in our holiday times: put it on

when your heart is light, and I shall know when to ask a favor, as when Ahasuerus lowered his sceptre."

One morning Mrs. Kent woke out of this lethargy; the sad moods and cheerful moods alike were gone. She came down bonneted and hooded; her cheek was flushed and her lip was dropped, and there was a visible agitation upon her, as if she had received some crowning disastrous news.

"Simon, put the gray horse to the gig," she cried over the kitchen banisters; "I must ride to Wells, and be there before noon."

"The mare was forty miles yesterday, ma'am; we must let her rest today."

"Ay, man, I can not walk to Wells while the horse is resting. Put the pony to the gig."

"The pony is out plowing with the mare, missis, and we dursn't stop the work."

"Law, man! what answers are those to me? The colt is idle; I saw him abroad on the hill. Harness him without delay, and have the gig at the back door in ten minutes."

"Mr. Kent gave strict orders, missis, that the colt should be turned out on grass, and we're agoing to take her shoes off this evening."

The parlor door opened suddenly behind the man—so suddenly and noisily that he screwed himself aside as if he expected an assault from behind. Coleman came out and stood beside his mother stern and peremptory.

"How dare you answer my mother, you insolent scoundrel? Put the colt to the gig, and if he's not harnessed in five minutes from this—he looked at his watch—your mistress will discharge you at an hour's notice. Come, no answers; down stairs to your duty."

The man was evidently cowed, and, weighing present menace against future indefinite advantage, determined to yield just then, till he was backed by the new master, whose return he daily expected. He retreated down stairs in sullen obedience, and Coleman turned anxiously to his mother to question her as to her intentions.

"*Bide you here*," she said; "I am *going upon my own business at last*."

"*Whatever it be*, mother, had you *not better let me accompany you?*"

"No, no, Will; I know my own business better than any one else. All is going wrong with us. I had a dream last night which told me all, and I never knew such a dream to come to nothing. I've had a many of them, and they all came true."

"I can not deny, mother, there is real ground for uneasiness, but you are surely too sensible to let a dream put you so much out; you have not been well for the last two or three days, and there was plenty to suggest."

"No, no, no," she said, grasping him by the wrist, "we shall all be ruined, Will; it was told me as plain last night as if that toad had shouted it in my ear. I dreamt we were all—you, poor Eleanor, Johnnie, and I—going a weary road to the work-house, turned out of our home by that toad; and I thought when we came to the gate they'd only let you and me in, dear heart alive, though Eleanor and the child were a screaming at the gate. There's ruin coming on us all; I'll stand it no longer, Will, but do what I ought to have done this sen'night. I'll draw every penny from the bank, and we'll hide it somewhere, you and I—I care not if it be behind a railway share or under a flagstone. Bide ye here till I come back."

He saw that argument would be useless in her present excitement, and, though loth to allow her to appear thus uncountenanced and alone before a prying country, exposed to the possibility of some scene should she meet with Kent, yet for very needs be he did not oppose her. He accompanied her down stairs, however, through the area, and along the little shrubbery round to the yard. The gig had been put to, and the tall black colt was pawing the paving-stones with an impatience which would have given the fidgets to most old ladies I know; but Mrs. Kent never noticed such trifles. She gathered up her cloak, laid one hand on her son's arm and another on the rail, and mounted to her seat beside the coachman.

"Mr. Coleman," said the groom, "here's a party as wants a word with you."

Quickly stepped a dapper little man to Coleman's side, and, with a little apologetic bow, placed a paper in his hand.

The action was unmistakable; the very look and gesture implied the service of a writ—a little legal instrument quite vulgarized to the meanest capacity. The groom understood it, and the coachman knew all about it. The proceeding was familiar even to the absorbed old lady, who had sufficient experience in the law. She called him over by the wheel and plucked the paper from his hands.

"That's the copy, and here's the original," said the little man, bowing and departing.

She tore the insulting document across, crumpled up the fragments, and, throwing them under her clogs, trampled upon them.

"There's an end of that, Will. Keep the house for me till I return. Now to Wells by Bleach Lane."

They drove out of the yard, and across the place to a back entrance opening upon a lane which led by a short cut to the road, but was so cut up in wet weather as to give rough work to wheels.

The coachman was just drawing rein, that he might open the gate, when a stout, elderly man came up from without, and, throwing it half open, stood right before the horse. The colt shied back a step or so, and pointed its ears.

He was a high-shouldered man, of about sixty and upward; his face was bleak and long, and his eye a joyless blue; but it seemed as if the embers of innate humor had not all been tramped out; they lurked in the wrinkles about eye and mouth, and flickered, as it were, on his long red nose, even through the fresh tears which trickled down its ridge. He was dressed in a large swallow-tailed coat of good broadcloth, and a waistcoat to correspond, from beneath which hung a cluster of old-fashioned seals. His legs were cased in drab tights, meeting at the knees, a pair of gaiters buttoned all down with mother-of-pearl buttons, and well splashed with mud; finally, he carried a heavy ash stick in his hand.

"I've come from Wells, ma'am," said he, in a strong Kilkenny accent.

"From Wells," said the stout old lady; "I'm going there straight myself. Did you meet Kent there?"

"I'm come here to meet him, ma'am; and when you remember I haven't stood within this gate this eight year, ye may think I've a wish to meet him to-day."

"Keep down that stick, man," said the coachman; "don't you see you frighten the horse?"

"If you wish to see him," said Mrs. Kent, "you must follow me into Wells. Bless the man! stand aside and let the colt go by."

"I'm come from my daughter's bedside, ma'am; do you wish to hear news of her?"

"Michael, your daughter's a bold wench—stand aside."

"Say nothin' agin her now, ma'am; she's stretched in her grave-clothes this morning. I've a heavy account agin Kent. It's out of respect to you, ma'am, I call that rascal in his name."

"You say your daughter's dead," said Mrs. Kent, stooping toward him; "that's well for her, Michael, and little loss to you. Go up to the house, man, and have your bed laid in the little room where you used to sleep when your master was alive."

"I'll take your offer kindly, ma'am, though divil a much sleep I'm like to have. I used to sit up for the poor masther that's gone, and now, so help me, I'll sit up for the new masther."

He dropped his stick, and, going to the horse's head, led him a few paces out till the gig was well clear of the entrance; then he took up his stick again, entered the gate, and closed it behind him.

Along the rutted lane the old mistress went at flying speed. So swift, so long was the horse's trot, that the gig swayed and rocked, her hood ballooned up roundly, her cloak flapped like wings, and one strong hand grasped the rail.

CHAPTER XIII.

Michael Bryan walked quickly up the avenue to the house, as if he did not wish to reflect too much upon that welcome and to find it wanting. Eight years before he had been farm-bailiff to old Mr. Coleman, to whom he had rendered himself valuable by his shrewdness and business capabilities, which were quite beyond the average of his countrymen; and, having been in his service for a period of seventeen years and upward, had established for himself

rights and privileges due to his long fidelity.

His master had been a man not easily dealt with. Upright and honorable in his business dealing and industrious in his daily routine, he was moreover reserved and proud in trifles, and, when opposed, became cross-grained and perfectly unmanageable. Michael spent a large portion of his life in studying and humoring him and oiling his hinges.

A long face is suggestive of wisdom, and Michael was wise after a whimsical fashion — not that pestilent wisdom which detects the errors and shortcomings of the household, and declares them on the housetop: he was an oily oracle, narrow indeed in his perception, strong in his prejudice, but very smooth and plausible in his treatment.

He became possessed of considerable influence at Hill Side in time, and it is only just to say he invariably employed it for the benefit of his mistress and the common weal.

He had a small family of his own within five minutes' walk from the house, whom he was not at the same trouble to conciliate. As is too often the case with your affable men, he was a somewhat tyrannical master upon his own hearthstone, and, although really a kind-hearted man, and emotional as his race, he used to keep his wife and pretty daughter in that perfect order which borders continually on rebellion. His affection for them was undoubted, and his discipline never amounted to cruelty; but the phenomenon could not be expected, and never was beheld in this world—a man who in duty smiles and blarneys abroad, and does not take his change out at home, demanding the sleekest obedience from his own. The poor fellow must have some vent; if his toe is to be always on the scrape during office-hours, it really must have leave to kick in moments of respite and relief in the bosom of his family. Michael was a czar at home.

Hill Side, which was the scene of Michael's diplomacy, was divided; there were jealousies and dissensions there sufficiently alluded to already, which became too much for him at last. Old Mr. Coleman quarreled with his eldest son, and though they loved one another through it all, they parted in pride. In vain Michael strove to stand in the breach, and exerted all his arts and sagacity to bring them together; but he was discomfited and roughly repulsed by the old man, and forced to find his level. Yet long after he found favor in the father's eyes by insinuating praises of the son, and keeping him in his memory. Michael, as elsewhere stated, traveled all the way to London to see the young master, and was hospitably entertained by him in the grand London establishment for nearly a month. Upon that occasion he took an extraordinary fancy to young Mrs. Coleman, whom he entertained by long sugary stories of Master Will's early history and home. When Michael returned to Hill Side he still found favor with the old man, as he described with unctuous prolixity the magnificence of the young master's establishment. There was no house like it in London, and no lady like his young lady in the four kingdoms. As for his old mistress, she was well apprised of her son's success, for he never ceased to correspond regularly with her; but she kept his correspondence to herself, and locked it in her drawers. Her husband, who had slept apart from her for many years, died suddenly one morning of apoplexy in his bed, and left the freehold to his widow, which she had brought him at her marriage. She wore her weeds with an honest complacency, and no one could accuse her of hypocrisy. What she felt she spoke: she was not sorry he was gone, and she cared not who knew it. No sooner had the house settled down after the funeral, than she gave old Michael, who had followed the hearse with tears and honors due, immediate warning. He retired upon his earnings to a cottage and a bit of land near Wells, where he became of some consequence, and was often summoned as a juror.

His duties concentrating in home, it was now observed that Michael was mellower in his domestic relations, and became more indulgent to his wife and daughter. But he had sown the wind, and up hurtled the hurricane in his path. Poor Lucy, the beauty of the country-side, had during his rigor grown to love her liberty too well, and young blood will riot into reaction when too long frozen down. She used to roam beside the Mayblossomed

hedges, and the birds soon whistled a lover to her. Her story is so common it is not worth the telling. Kent, a young and idle man, engaged her affections, made her promises of marriage, and I know not what, and met her every day. What came of it at last? A cry in the night which woke her mother—a cry of pain which none can forget who once have heard—and all was discovered. Lucy was a mother, and her father's horror was succeeded by inexorable indignation when he found that her love had been given to Kent, his supplanter at Hill Side. As soon as she had strength enough to bear moving he made her quit his house, rivaling his dead master in implacability. He assisted her, however, with small sums, and she supported herself by glove-making, in which she was proficient, till Kent's influence at Hill Side enabled him to obtain a situation for her in the house. But her father swore he would never look on her again till her dying day.

Yesterday the poor girl took him at his word, remembering it when she lay in the death-throes, with her arms round her baby. He must come to see her on her dying day. And old Michael came with a heart too large for his bosom, his old eyes streaming with regret, and he comforted her in his softest tones, even to that strange moment when all around her—the child, the hospital pallets, the sunshine, and the whitewashed walls, were vanishing from her eyes; and when all had vanished and all was dark, he closed her lids himself, till they should open belike in other sunshine, as he believed.

The reader now knows enough of old Michael to understand the part he plays in succeeding events; we will follow him to the hall door, and meet Coleman on the steps. The latter came forward with a hearty outstretched hand, and reproached him for not having come to visit him before. Michael took his hand, and retained his grip of it; as he spoke his voice was low and confidential.

"It's well, Masther Will, I've a timperate steady man like you by me, and I'm goin' to ax you to stop me jist short of murder and no more, while I give Kent his due *to-day.*"

"*Oh, come, Michael,* my good fellow, we've had enough disturbance here; you're right welcome, old friend, while I'm in the house, but let's have quiet. I believe this poor old house, Mick, will never see a peaceful day till some vagabond burns it down. Come in, and Mrs. Coleman, your friend, will give us a glass of wine and something to eat. Why, it's ten years since I saw your face, and you're a hale man yet."

"I've but one business here, Masther Will. Do you see that bit of ash? it's been seasonin' for him this many a year. He's a squire's son, and I was once a spalpeen wid a sickle under my arm, and I'll whale him the sounder for that, too."

"Nonsense, man; your intentions are excellent, but I can assure you, Mick, instead of serving your poor mistress, you will be doing her great mischief. You are so old a friend of the family, I speak freely to you. You know, Mick, if my mother needed any protection, mine is all she requires, and it would be highly improper, too, that it should come from any other quarter; but I accept your kind intentions all the same."

"Masther Will, my poor daughter Lucy will be buried to-morrow, and I forgave her this morning; it was afther the blessed oil had been poured on her feet, and she was partin', with one hand in mine and the other round her bit of frailty. I forgave her, and I saw the shaddy of her great sin passin' off her as her eyes rowled up; she's lyin' there as pure as virgin wax. I tell ye I'll come at him like a ton of coals," he cried, with violence, "and baste him till his velveteens fall off him in strips."

"I am heartily sorry for your affliction, Mick, and so will my wife be; here she comes down stairs to see you. Hear how she runs to see you."

He turned and announced the sad tidings to his wife, killing the smile that was beaming on her face when she saw old Michael standing within. "I am grieved to hear of it; I had taken a great interest in her," she said, in a tone of deep sympathy.

"I know you did, honey; you was more nat'ral to her than I were myself, and if that's a debt I can't pay, begor there's another I'll pay off to-day or to-morrow."

"Hush, hush, man!" said Coleman

interrupting him. "Here's an old fellow, Nellie, who has served his country as a juror in the assizes, and is a house proprietor, whom every body respects for his good sense and judgment, going to take the law into his own hands and assault Mr. Kent. Why, man, you'll only put yourself completely at his mercy. In the first place, he's a younger man than you are, and it's likely you'll get more of that stick than he; and I can tell you, as a fact, he's a deuced sharp fellow at the law, and he'll have you up for assault, and heavily fined or imprisoned. Come, now, you, a man of sixty, to whom we all look up for advice, you'd look well standing in the police dock, wouldn't you?"

"When I've had the satisfaction of hearing that stick ring against his big backbone I'll bear any thing cheerfully, Masther Will. It will be a great comfort to me, as nothin' else could be, and it's not much glory he'll get by the business if his villainies against my poor child come to light. I'll carry the country with me, Masther Will."

"Come, you'll think better of it," said Coleman. "No one is here but my wife and myself—Mr. Kent has not been at home these many nights. Come along, Michael, we'll have a talk over old times to cool us, and let this sad business go by for to-day." They led the old man in, whose spirits were thus balancing between pathos and wrath, and placed him by the parlor fire, where Coleman sat humoring him and diverting his mind, while Eleanor brought wine and glasses, and set a cold round of beef before him.

"Now, Mick," said Coleman, pleasantly, "you never saw such fare as that in the jury-room—let's see what you're able to do: if you can't handle a knife well, it's clear you could not handle a stick."

They seemed to pacify him just then, as they flattered and consoled him by turns. Under the cheerful influence of the wine and his kind company, the bleakness was presently banished from Michael's long cheek, and was replaced by a cracked ruddiness, more in keeping with his important central feature; but his murderous stick was by him still, and Eleanor could perceive he was holding himself ready at any time to show fight.

She brought in Johnnie to attract the old fellow, and he placed the child on his knee, mauling his curls affectionately as he launched into some indiscretions about Kent, which put Eleanor into a considerable fidget.

Masther Johnnie would grow up into a strong man, and he'll showlder that ould cuckoo Kent out of his house and grounds, for he was an awful villain, and had no business there; but ould Michael was papa's friend, and would chastise him that night for what he did to poor Lucy.

"It was granny beat Lucy," said the boy, "but you must not hurt granny."

"Is Johnnie much changed since you saw him last?" said Eleanor, quickly.

"Musha, thin, he's not greatly, honey; he looks, maybe, a thrifle the worse for over-coddling. Now I suppose, if I was to puff on his cheek, or to give him a look through my glass of wine at the daylight, you'd think he had his death?"

"Well said, Michael!" laughed Coleman, covering Johnnie's retreat still farther, and encouraging the old fellow's gleam of good-humor; "she's just the same to this day; I give you my word we're going to cork him up in a glass bottle, and we'll produce the young imp on pudding days, just like precious Irish whisky. I don't see why we should not preserve him in good sound eight-year old—eh, Mick?"

With this nonsense he kept the old man diverted for a while. A room, meantime, had been got ready for him below, and a fire lighted. Coleman accompanied him down stairs to see that all was comfortable, and left him to himself. Then, somewhat exhausted by his effort at entertainment, which he was anxious should not fail toward one of such approved loyalty to himself, Coleman went out on the lawn to await his mother's return. It was now late in the afternoon, and his ear must soon catch the sound of wheels; he walked up and down the avenue, permitting unconscious signs of impatience and distress to escape from him, as men will do when they are alone. He writhed in thought as he pondered on the insult of the morning: this *was* Kent's house, and he *was* eating Kent's bread, and he was tied here hand and foot with a numbing sense of dishonor

upon him. Will no letter come by the evening mail? Have all former obligations and honorable dealings with his friends escaped their mind, so that they would not trust him with security for a few paltry hundreds? He almost turned a Timon to think of it. After his humiliation in asking, their silence stung him sorely. His eyes wandered over the hills in the direction of London, from whence he had fled. He thought in that sinking hour that it were well to be back within the sound of Bow bells, with the smoke, the noise, the creditors, and the sponging-house. The broad yellow hazel-leaves showered around him in the breeze. Would they were gold pieces floated down to him that he might gather them, and flee away with all he loved, and be at rest!

The evening was beginning to darken, and he was growing uneasy. He stood at the gate till he became deadly chill, listening for the sound of wheels. At last they came with a weary rumble, and, looking up the turn of the lane, he saw the gig slowly returning; his mother's figure leaned wearily forward, as though she had met with some hurt. He hastened up the road to meet her, and, bidding the coachman stop, he mounted on the step and raised her head. She was changed: her face was collapsed, the jaw was dropped, and her eyes were set in wrinkles; the wind had given her skin a pucey chill, and misery helped it. He questioned her anxiously if she were hurt, and she gave him a short answer.

"I am not hurt — never heed me. Drive home, Simon."

Coleman stepped down much alarmed, and followed her to the house. When he arrived she was standing in the hall, and the gig had been driven round to the yard.

"We are ruined!" she said; "all my money is drawn."

"Let it go, dear mother," he said; "I am young enough to make another fortune, and I won't lose it so foolishly again."

She made him no reply, but listlessly let drop her shawl from her shoulders and went shivering up stairs. She shut herself in and would not appear at dinner, and when Coleman went up to her room with some refreshment, there was a wooden bolt on the inside drawn across against him. He waited there full ten minutes, and heard her moving to and fro from the window to her bed. Again he sought an entrance, but she made no reply except for a deep masculine sob which shocked and sickened him to hear; he never remembered to have heard her crying before; it was not the usual vent she found for either her grief or anger; and he went down stairs with a sudden access of trouble which left him but a moody companion for Eleanor.

She put Johnnie early to bed in their own room that night, and sat up with him till he was asleep; then, leaving a night-light burning on the dressing-table, she locked the door upon her treasure, put the key in her pocket, and stole down stairs to her husband in the sitting-room.

"There's that obstinate old fool sitting up to make a disturbance in the house," said he, "and the servants of course suspect that he means mischief. They'll all be on the look-out—six pair of ears below on the alert all night. I must sit up here in case that man comes in—and I hear he's expected—to prevent any mischief; but do you go to bed, love; you have been very much shaken during the last week."

She took her work and sat down close beside him in the firelight.

"You seem to know very little of me, Will, if you think I'm going to leave your side to-night.'

He assured her there was not the slightest cause for uneasiness; he would give her his promise there should be no repetition of violence under any conceivable provocation. He was sitting up to prevent it. But he might as well remonstrate with his shadow: there she sat, and only answered him in the end by bidding him be content.

This little dialogue took place early in the evening; but as the night came on—a silent night, with every now and then a creeping breeze, charged with distant bayings of the house-dogs, and those indescribable sounds, bred, as it were, by the silence itself. They talked less and less, till at length they fell into a mute vigil. The candles were unlit, and there was a great gray pile of cloud visible afar, which kept its ghostly shape for an hour, so still was the night. Uncomfortably audible were the wheel

of the wagons passing along the road, and the voices of the men that drove them. Eleanor saw her husband's eyes wander toward the window, and his head slightly poised aside as if he listened intently. A powerful infection of anxiety fell upon her and oppressed her; she spoke in whispers at first, to break the chilly spell of this vigil, but at length she yielded to it, and could do nothing but listen. The fire was getting low, she dared not stir it, and when her husband did so, the crash of the metal bars shocked her. She felt the key of her room safe in her pocket, and she insinuated the other hand between her husband's, that she might feel more secure.

"You must be tired and sleepy, love," he said aloud, and she started in her chair to hear such an unmodulated tone.

"You'd better go to bed now; I can see you're nervous."

"No, no, Will; I'll sit up till you can come to bed with me. I suppose there can be no danger?"

"Not the slightest fear, love," he said, cheerfully. "To-morrow, if this old fool won't hear reason, I'll have mother to send him home; he's like an old man of the mountains upon our shoulders. I wish we could have Kent and him into the cattle-pound down below, and let them fight it out till they had nothing left of them but their sticks."

"But are you not uneasy for your mother too, love? I know she is sitting up watching too."

"Well, I am not quite easy; I should wish to be within earshot, you know, for he has done her cruel wrong. God help her!"

"Hush! Ain't that a step, Will?"

They fell to listening again. There was a step, indeed, that seemed coming up the avenue direct. Heavy and even it came on to the time of a whistled march, brisk and rapid; now it seemed crushing the gravel.

* * * *

No, it died away upon the road; its seeming approach was a mere juggle of the night, and the creeping breeze came rising away—away from over woody leagues—and arrived about the house laden with the bayings of the watch-dogs and the nameless sounds of night.

Eleanor began watching intently again, thrusting her hand once more between her husband's palms. Every one seemed watching in this house—the old inveterate man of the mountains below in stern grief for his poor dead wench; the old woman up stairs in her envenomed despair; the servants are alert at this moment in their beds; her husband watches like a figure of stone, his face and figure ribbed with the fire-light; the very stars without seem watching.

"A few moments, and we all may hear his tread," thought Eleanor, "and his key in the latch; then how the servants will start up in their beds to listen, and the old man will be on the stir, and Mrs. Kent's tread will be heard up stairs, and Will must rise and leave me all in the dead of the night." What may not happen within the next half hour?—loud voices and curses, and, perhaps, the cry of Johnnie up stairs. It struck one o'clock.

"Come," said Coleman, rising, "he will not be home to-night. I'll go down and send that old impostor to his bed, and then we'll lock the door."

He rose and crossed the room, closing the shutters and barring them; she followed him closely. He bade her wait for him in the hall; he would be up with her in a few seconds.

"Turn the key, Will, before you go down," she said; "it will be such a relief."

He went over, turned the key, and fixed the chain; then he went down stairs with gently flapping slippers, and Eleanor stood there alone in the dead of the night. While she stood there, and was fancying she saw the tall pale clouds and the stars up against the dark landing, she heard the gate without open and close, and feet came down the avenue. No mistake about them now—heavy tottering feet up to the very door, till they struck against the stone steps. A hand seemed to insert a latch-key into the key-hole without, and the door was shaken impatiently; she thought she could see the shadows of two legs beneath it, and, struck with the moment's foolish terror, she caught the banisters for support. The latch-key, if latch-key it was, was withdrawn, and the door was forcibly shaken once or twice again; and then, whoever it

might have been seeming to abandon hope of entrance, retreated with tottering steps.

Her husband, when he came up stairs, found her in this flutter, and inquired what was the matter; but she kept her secret for that night, for it occurred to her that he might open the door and summon back this staggering nightly visitor to affright her.

They went up to bed together, and the painful spell was lifted from the house. All were soon asleep in it. No sounds were audible but the rats below, and the spectral tick, tick of the clocks.

The next morning Eleanor's cheek was so pale and her eyes so dim that Coleman determined at all hazards to have her away into the country for a trip. His authority was so far allowed by the servants that none had the nerve to disobey him.

The colt was caught, and harnessed and tackled to the gig by Simon. On a propitious, windy, blue morning, he drove his wife and little son off among the country hills of Somersetshire, all heaving green.

They stopped the gig by a pleasant young wood, on whose mossy floor there were whole shoals of broken sunshine moving busily hither and thither, as the wind tossed the young larches. They had a lad whom they met on the road, and who seemed to be a young Selkirk in this beautiful desert of tree and meadow, to mind the horse, while our little party penetrated far into the wood. There, while Johnnie was flushing the blackbird like a keen sportsman, bedight in black velvet tunic a little below his naked knees, and black velvet cap with a brave ostrich feather, Coleman and his wife began to talk of their deliverance.

He took a desponding view, partly to elicit some plausible reassurance, and partly out of his real depression and misgiving. "That man," he said, "has evidently changed his mind; his silence has no other meaning; we do not seem to have much prospect of assistance. Here we must remain absolutely at that drunken rascal's mercy. Here we are, like poor badgers in a barrel, waiting to be drawn."

"We shall have money this evening," *said Eleanor, quietly.*

"*Come, then, Eleanor*, let us sit here till the ravens bring us some," he said; "it is their special task to wait on prophets like you."

He seated himself on a bank, and Eleanor stood beside him.

"I repeat, Will, we shall have money this evening. I spared your pride, which I knew would be troublesome to me, and wrote a letter on my own responsibility to my friend Mr. Cole,* referring him to your friends, and inclosing him the letter we received from Mr. ——. I then asked him (you know it was no great compliment, Will, for there's my money under his hands)—I asked him for the immediate loan of a hundred pounds, and I expect his answer must be here by the late post."

He took his time, as usual, to answer her.

"Well, Nellie, I should not have done it, and I think nothing will come of it; but, since it is done, why, we'll make the most of it and be happy."

He got up again, and they moved about through tangled fern and bramble in the sweet fresh breeze, which strengthened as it blew, and they passed through the wood and came down upon a glad green slope, down which the wind—the broad-breasted wind—was running.

"God send that money!" muttered Coleman to himself, as Eleanor was calling to Johnnie, who lingered far behind.

Without her, it seems to me, with all his masculine and work-a-day philosophy, it had gone hard with Coleman in the great ordeal which he has dragged through, for he was one of our deep and sensitive English natures which brood over fancied dishonor, and in which care works with silent sap and mine; her muffled strokes unheard by relative or friend till, haply, on some bleak November morning he wanders out on a stroll and is found next day in the muddy Thames, or lying on some heath with a bullet through his temple.

They all came home toward evening; they dare not stay away longer, lest some mischief might happen; and Eleanor ran in impatiently to get before her husband and see if there were a London letter. None; but she must be the herald of good news. On the hall table lay a business-like London letter. She

* The friendly trustee.

snatched it up and tore it open. It was all she said it would be, and she felt as if a pair of gauzy wings had shot out from her shoulders to flee away with: here was the bank order for a hundred pounds, and a post-office order for immediate necessities.

"Here, Will, your mother and Johnnie and I start by the morning train."

Many a hundred pounds had passed through Coleman's hands, and he used to account it but a trifle. A hundred more or a hundred less at the end of the year was something to be just entered in the books and forgotten—it was a mere plank in the good ship he commanded. Now it was like that plank grasped by his drowning hand.

"Well done, Nellie," he said; "you've unlocked the prison gate."

CHAPTER XIV.

They were all so refreshed by country air and good news that evening, that Eleanor could afford to laugh at her fears of the preceding night, and merrily made preparations for tea. Her mother-in-law had kept her room the whole day, and had scarcely broken her fast. She did not seem likely to be very violent in the event of a meeting with her husband; her spirit seemed quite broken, as a helpless old lady's must needs be: a poor old gray mare caught and in the traces, she must submit and founder patiently at last under a relentless whip. It is mournful, but gradual and without danger, the process of breaking an old heart. Then there was nothing farther to be apprehended than an altercation between old Michael and Kent, which, as her husband was on the side of peace, could not involve him in any danger. All this she thought in the windy evening sunshine, with Johnnie rosy with hunger and health by her side, gloating at the pears she had brought in from the garden as a relish for their tea.

"It will be a wet night," said Coleman, "bright as it looked just now." He pointed to the piles of wan raincloud rising in tumultous forms into the autumn sky. "We shall not have a visitor to-night."

Coleman's first care on his return had been to make inquiries about his mother, and he had ascertained, as related above, that she had not left her room, and, excepting for a cup of tea and bit of dry toast in the morning, did not seem to have broken her fast; the cook supposed she was in bed, but her door was locked, and no one dare disturb her, she was so irritable and dark. He went up to her door softly and knocked, asking might he come in. He supposed her to be in bed, and in expecting an answer, his attention was directed to that part of the room to the left where stood the bed, but he heard her rise from a chair at the window. She crossed the room to the door and opened it.

She stood in uncertain light, and he could not distinctly see her face, but it seemed to him that shocking change he had observed on the previous day was fixed there yet, as if she had been inoculated in a few hours with twenty haggard years. He entreated her to come down, assuring her that there was no one below but Eleanor, Johnnie, and himself; they were making their dinner and tea into one, and she must come down and have dinner with them; it was no good giving way like this.

She answered him harshly and abruptly.

"I am ill; it is hard I can not be let alone. What do ye want wi' me, you young people? I'll not go to ye."

"We are all lonely for you, mother, and wish for nothing so much as to have your company below."

"Ye do not want me; I can not stand your talk to-night. Mind you leave the hall door unlocked again to-night, that is all."

"Would you like to have Johnnie with you, mother? He will bring you up your supper, and play in the room with you for a while."

"Not he; what have I to do with babes? You and Eleanor may call the house your own, but do not trouble me again. Will, mind ye leave the door unlocked, that's all."

With these words she closed her room door, and he turned away disappointed. He then went down stairs to see how matters went on below during his absence. It appeared from the servants, who had become singularly alert and communicative, that Mr. Kent had not yet returned, but was still expected hourly by Dudson, the new farm bailiff.

Old Michael, they affirmed, had been up to the town for an hour or so, and subsequently had been prowling about the place till late in the afternoon, having just now returned to his sentry-box. They all were grumbling at his presence, but said the old mistress had refused to have him disturbed. "What had he come there for?" asked the cook, a fussy important soul: this old man had filled the kitchen with a smell of rum and tobacco-smoke, that came reeking through the window which divided his little room from her realm.

Coleman went in to see old Michael, who must have heard the flattering compliments of the cook, but was evidently little moved by them. He sat on an old arm-chair at his table, along which lay his stick and pipe, but he had since added another counselor and companion of a more soothing nature than that threatening ashen club. A stout bottle of Jamaica rum already tapped stood at his elbow, and a tumbler beside it containing a generous libation.

After some good-natured questions, whether he were made comfortable, and so forth, Coleman began to reason with him again upon his mischievous intentions. The old man was sly enough to escape from the subject, and evade any farther direct declaration, but Coleman perceived that his pugnacity was still undiminished.

"This old man of the mountains," said he to Eleanor when he came up stairs, "is clinging upon our shoulders still; I must sit up a few hours again to-night. You're a late bird like myself, Nell, so I won't ask you to go to bed before me, as I know it would be no use."

He laid the whole stress of the need for sitting up upon the danger of old Michael's getting into mischief, concealing from her other causes of anxiety; but she watched his face that evening when he was not minding, and she thought she fathomed them.

It began to grow late; the rain had come and the wind was blowing, and Eleanor's fears began to return, stealing back again into her heart: her mother-in-law so silent up stairs; old Michael watching below; her husband beginning his vigil again; and the door unlocked. *She began thinking of that nightly visitor who had frightened her,* of the constant false alarms, and all the threatened possibilities — she saw every thing again through a distorting atmosphere. Coleman seemed to observe the shadow gathering on her pretty face, and he began talking with a hardy cheerfulness — so it seemed to her—quite out of keeping with the circumstances. She strove, however, with hesitating smiles, to respond to his kind pleasantries, being most unwilling to worry him with her sleepless fears and misgivings. She let Johnnie stay up with them, and he lay there at her feet in the ruddy firelight, turning over a picture-book and spelling out stories. Ten o'clock had struck, and she watched him still, with mere shreds of smiles as the child laughed boldly out at some comic incident in his book. For two reasons she could not bring herself to interrupt his amusement and put him to bed. In the first place, the child's heedless laughter reassured her in a measure; there he was full in sight, and under her own and her husband's protection, as happy as a duckling in Regent's Park. He need not listen to what she must listen to — that wind, that mimic wind without, curling round the chimneys and piping dismal Jeremiads down to her, like an old woman's screams—that mimic wind, now shouting like a man, as it rushed with asthmatic passion down the hill to throw a Samson embrace round the house. Johnnie laughed through it all, and reassured her. Her second reason for remitting him from bed-hour was unworthy of her, being simply this — she was afraid to go up stairs with him alone, and ashamed to ask her husband to accompany her.

"Johnnie!"

It was a distant voice that uttered the child's name; it dropped down, as it were, from somewhere among them; it might have wandered to them from beyond the wild black hill, or from the ceiling, or from beneath the boards. Eleanor started up from her chair to her feet, and in truth Johnnie rose quickly too from his comfortable lair on the rug, and clung to his mother.

"Was that the wind?" whispered Eleanor, catching her husband's coat.

"It is only poor granny calling over the stairs, you pair of geese," said Coleman, "and I am very glad of it. Come

Eleanor, it is time the child were in bed, and let my poor mother have him with her to-night; it is the last time, darling, I'll ever ask you while we are in this house."

He crossed the room, and, opening the door, replied cheerfully to the old lady, who stood on the top landing.

"I want the child with me to-night, Will; Eleanor can come up and put him to bed."

Again he answered cheerfully, and told her Eleanor would bring her up the child in a few moments.

I don't know what had come over Eleanor that night, but she withstood her husband's request with an eager, wistful energy which was out of all proportion to the concession demanded. She tried to coax him out of it, and promised to go up and sit with his mother for a while, and then she gently bullied him. "No, no, no! she would not let the child out of her sight that night; the house was all upset; they didn't know what might happen at any moment; how could he ask her?"

"I would not press you, darling, but that I am so wretched about my mother. No hurt could possibly come to the child."

"I do not know that—I do not know that," she cried, "so many things have happened in this wretched house; and you see the child is frightened. Oh! do not ask me that, dear."

"Johnnie," said his father, "are you afraid to sleep in the room with poor granny? You are not frightened at her? Perhaps she has brought you presents from town."

"Don't, don't," moaned Eleanor; "this is not fair."

"For my sake, Nellie, I ask you this one night, and I'll pledge myself never to ask you again. On the slightest disturbance I will bring him into your room."

She yielded to him at last with tears, and, taking the child by the hand, she brought him up stairs.

"What makes you tremble, mamma?" said the child on their way up. "Are you cold?"

Mrs. Kent's door was ajar, and when she heard their steps she met them on the lobby. Eleanor said little, lest she should chance to sob outright, for she was in a foolish perverse mood, unlike her gentle self; but Johnnie was thinking of that present from town, and, going over to his grandmother, he kissed her face, and asked her why she had not combed her pretty white hair. When his expectation began to fail, he knelt down at her lap by the window to say his prayers.

"Bless the child," she said; "it seems as if he was praying to me. Say it to your mother, dearie."

So he went over and said his short prayer to Eleanor, who sat apart, jealous of her child. She then undressed him slowly and put him in the little cot in the recess. When she had tucked him in snugly, and drawn a shawl tent-like over him to shut out the candle-light, finding no farther excuse for delay, she was leaving him lingeringly, and bade the old lady, who sat aside, by the window, a murmured good-night.

Her greeting was responded to by a sound like a groan. Eleanor's sensitive ear caught the tone. "Mother," she said, "I am sure the child will be in your way; you do not want him here, and I could just carry him nicely across."

"No, bless you," said the old lady, with fretful harshness, "you must leave the child with me; I want to see him sleeping. 'Twill humanize me."

It was a queer, savage phrase, and the startled mother would still have lingered, hankering for her child, had not her husband come up for her. He kissed his mother on the cheek, and then led Eleanor away with him down stairs to the sitting-room again.

Now this sitting-room, be it remembered, was directly under Mrs. Kent's room; the same chimney-flue pierced both chambers up to the roof, and every sound above was distinctly audible. Eleanor thought she could hear her little boy's breathings as she sat at the fire, and she kept listening to them, and striving with misgivings, till of a sudden her husband put his arm round her waist, and began to talk to her of the good news.

He seemed to pleasure himself this dreary night in realizing the morrow. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

He descended to the practical details of his plans, which are the readiest means, perhaps, of such realization, cal-

culating the expenses of the journey, and of the first week in an hotel. But Eleanor lost the reckoning, and answered far astray. Her sympathy was somehow out of tune to-night.

"You are not attending, Nell," he said. "Come, what was I saying?"

"Three second-class tickets and a half," said Eleanor, "will be £5 5*s*., and—was that Johnnie awakening up stairs?"

"Now let Johnnie alone; he's not thinking of you. Listen to me, Nell."

He began to express some doubts as to the best course to take with his mother—whether to use persuasion or decision, or to take her by surprise at the last moment, for he calculated she would not bear to be left alone.

"We shall only speak of it as a short absence," he said. "I have it, Nell: we'll promise her a lawsuit to recover her money—that will be irresistible."

"But suppose she refuses to come," said Eleanor, "shall you and I remain?"

"You and I will leave this to-morrow, Nell, if it snowed ten feet in the night; nothing shall tempt me to remain. But she won't refuse, Nell. A stout country lady is noted in these parts for her love of law, just as in cities they love cards and gossip. My mother is devoted to the law, Nell, and, being the simplest creature herself in the world, she is very pugnacious in upholding her rights, and believes devoutly that justice and law mean the same thing. A summons is a perfect little treat to her, and a lawsuit, why, God bless her! she'd live a hundred years on one."

"Hush, Will! Did you hear that door slam?"

"Yes, yes, it was only the wind. The whole house is sounding like a cotton-mill on a night like this."

"It was not the wind. Would you just steal up and see if the child is quiet, like a dear boy? I am so uneasy, you can't think."

"Why, darling love, nothing has come of the slamming door."

"Only listen."

"It was nothing but the bath-room door which I left open; all is quiet again. You may be sure Johnnie will sing out if he's hurt. Now, Nellie, you have not heard a word I was saying."

"*Yes, yes, I did—how to tempt your* mother to come with us; I'm so glad, Will."

"I'll not forget it to this friend of yours, Nell—this friend in foul weather, who has stood in the breach when all my own friends have hung back. I don't know, Nell, but the best crucial test of sterling friendship is a money loan on a pinch."

"Oh, that's so pleasant, Will! Don't be angry with me, but I want to ask you one little question: Do you think your mother would object if I just brought in a few cloaks and your railway rug? I could make myself up quite comfortably on the sofa, you know; it might be as well for her sake as for any thing else. I could cheer her, perhaps."

"My dear child, once for all, you know about as much of my mother, or how to manage her, as Johnnie does of a steam-engine. When you fancied you were easing her off, you'd have her up to high pressure. Let her alone; you're thinking a deal more of Johnnie than of her."

"Well, never mind, go on," said Eleanor; "I know I'm foolishly nervous—go on."

"Why, Nellie, you ought to be able to go on now yourself," he said; "you have knocked the life out of my story. You, and I, and mother are going to form a colony, and have a flower-garden, and play Tom Tiddler's ground together till I can get a pen behind my ear again. That little villa, Nell—I wonder is it let?"

"But, Will, the rent is fifty pounds a year."

"Mother will lend a hand, Nell; she must have her allowance, you know."

He paused for a while and built his air-castle to himself, till he broke out at last with an exclamation of happiness.

"With the blessing of God, Nell, we'll free her to-morrow from the body of this death."

"Why—why did you say that so loud? you startled me."

"What a coward you are, Nell! I'm in great heart, to-night: they say great joy is an ill omen. I hope not, for I'm in great heart to-night."

"Will, I am listening to some one coming down the avenue; I am certain here he is, for I heard wheels at the gate."

Coleman listened.

"Yes, I think it is he, Nellie; but, to comfort you," he added, with a smile, "I have been listening to another sound —old Michael snoring like a grampus down stairs. All will go off quietly, only sit still."

The arm that encircled her was so firm, and his voice was so even, that he somewhat tempered her fears. She lay against him confidingly, and awaited the event.

"There he is at the door. Remember, Will, you promised me solemnly," said she, whispering with her wonted emphasis, "you promised me never to be violent with him again."

"I promise you once more, Nellie—lie still."

There was the click of a latch-key in the door; it opened with a burst, and the draught swept under the carpet, tossing it into ripples. An open letter Coleman had laid upon the table, the letter of good news, was taken up bodily and blown in the fire. Then the hall door was shut with force; all in the room was still as before, but there was an unsteady tread in the hall.

"He is coming in here," whispered Eleanor, tightening her grasp upon his arm. "Now, Will, remember."

"Never fear—he is at the hall table —all will go well."

"How unsteady he seems, Will! he is tipsy." They listened, and heard the lurching steps going down the kitchen stairs, and his deep thick voice talking as if to himself.

"Oh, Will, he is quite tipsy! Surely, surely we ought not to leave the child in the room."

"He is going down stairs, love. I shall take Johnnie into our room on the slightest sign of a disturbance; but there will not be any. You see he is steady enough to get down to the kitchen without a candle. He would not hurt the child; you know he was always good-natured enough to Johnnie. Now only wait."

After this, Coleman's conversation lost its ease; his smiles were forced, and Eleanor felt his heart beating faster than its wont. It was evident he was watching too. They could hear Kent still talking to himself as it seemed, and they heard him laugh. It appeared quite certain he would awake his sleeping enemy, and Coleman held himself ready to interfere if there was any indication of approaching violence.

"Hush! there's your mother crossing the room up stairs, Will; she's coming down."

"Wait, wait, Nell, till we see what turn things take; we can not know how to act just now; I dare say she will come in here."

They listened to the old lady's footfalls, which were very light and noiseless, save for the creaking of one or two decrepit stairs under her weight. She passed through the hall and went down to the kitchen.

"How your heart beats, Will! Do you think there will be a terrible scene now?"

"No, no—wait—let's listen. Don't be afraid, you foolish girl."

Presently they heard Kent's mocking voice, half smothered by an onset of the wind against the casements. His voice seemed then like the blasphemies of some wizard riding the distant blast. It ceased, and there came no rejoinder.

"Ay," said Coleman, relieved, "I knew my mother would not answer him; it is all quietly over now, and she will come up to us."

They listened intently, but the voices had ceased; there was no sound of returning feet. All human sound was still.

"It's all over safely, thank God," repeated Coleman, sitting up relieved; "she has taken him quietly. She is waiting to give him time to reflect; she will not argue with a drunkard. Still they listened to hear her come up, but there was no sound of ascending feet, though they fancied they heard Kent talking again, as if to himself, with a queer maudlin tenderness.

CHAPTER XV.

Let us now go back and join Mr. Kent on his journey home along the blustering road, as at some time between eleven and twelve he came driving up toward Hill Side in his dogcart. The horse he drove was a shying, mettlesome brute, and in the long dark journey from Wells, ay, and six miles beyond it, Mr. Kent had had some five or six chances of a broken neck. He

had broken the necks of half a dozen of Champagne this afternoon, however, and was in that dare-devil mood which so often acts like a life-charm against fire, water, or stone wall. On that spot upon the road, so often indignantly pointed to by the parishioners as an instance of gross neglect on the part of the authorities in leaving it without repair—that dangerous spot which haunts the imagination of belated ladies driving home in the dark, over which old Cocksy Dyke, the blind cock-fighter, once lurched in the broad daylight with a red bantam under either arm, and was found a broken corpse below in the morning among the stones and wild poppies, the two birds in full crow over him — in fine, that spot on the Wells road where a crumbling bit of wall six inches high is the only protection against a sheer tumble of twenty feet on broken limestone. By this fatal spot the dogcart had whirled, poised on one wheel over the abyss, with nothing but its own weight, as it whisked round the bend of the road, to save it from blind smash below.

Again at the two white piers of Squire Denison's place, which stand like ghostly sentries, had this flighty mare shied wildly while trotting twelve miles an hour. So airy and unexpected was that spring aside that Mr. Kent's weight broke through the splash-board, and the nimble iron of her two hoofs shot within a few inches of his stomach. Yet he recovered himself, heaven knows how—for *he* did not—and a moment after was dashing along once more in happy-go-lucky speed. These and other escapes had Mr. Kent; yet he arrived without a scratch at Hill Side gate, adjoining which, as has been already explained, stood the stables.

He pulled in, and, jumping down, opened the gate. Through the gateway he led that young flirt Starlight into the lawn—Starlight, Lord Cole's late carriage-horse, begotten from Whitestar by Duke Frederick, the famous trotter, and purchased by Mr. Kent last week for two hundred pounds.

He routed up Simon, thundering with his boot-heels against his door; and having once seen the groom employed *in rubbing down* the precious *mare, he proceeded to* the hall door, all rustling and flapping in his spacious oilskin.

Now, whether it was Mr. Kent's self in the flesh, or Mr. Kent's double, who last night came heavily to the door at the same hour when Eleanor stood within, or whether, perchance, it was some marauder who had a design upon the plate, or a belated youth who had a design upon the knocker, or even a pot-companion of Mr. Kent's, who, understanding that the late farm bailiff was now the master here, supposed his friends would be welcome to a pipe or a glass of gin hot in the parlor, or, finally, whether step, latch-key, and impatient shake of the lock were not the mere delusions of a frightened woman's fancy — and all the foregoing conjectures seem less probable than the last—intelligent readers can conjecture for themselves. It is certain Kent came forging up to the door on the present occasion, after a journey of sixteen miles, with a confident and decisive mien. Confidently and decisively he produced his cigar-holder, and applied it to the hole for the latch-key, when, discovering his mistake, he dived his hand into his pocket through a mass of loose jingling coin, and secured his key. He was just about to insert it into the door, when he made a sudden step aside and stared into the dark clump of shrubs which grew by the house-wall. In the war of inanimate nature, a sound of life, though it be the mere scurry of a mouse in the wainscot, is apt to catch the ear, and distinguish itself from other noises. Now, in the drifting of withered leaves against the wall, and amid the wrestling and beating of branches, there was a rustling and stir quite close to him of some living thing. It was so black and void beneath the trees that he could not distinguish what this moving creature was, and being in that pleasant, yet foggy state of brain in which one takes confidential counsel with one's self aloud, "It's only the pony," he said, "only the pony sheltering among the trees. Hup, Jock! are you there? Hi hup, old girl!"

He inserted his latch-key forthwith, and, having opened the door, in stepped he and the wind, both in reckless mood, when, before he could close the door again, he distinctly heard a quick pat

ter through the leaves, and a queer little form stood before him, fluttering wildly on the door-step in the uncertain light. With an impulse of dare-devil curiosity he let fly a kick at the little figure, whatever it might be, and of a verity his toe touched something soft and upright — something that moved quickly back in timorous retreat.

Now, in the riotous bachelor's house which he had just left, some six miles beyond Wells, there was a fine Newfoundland dog, which he had much conceited and fondled. It occurred to him then, in his heady and unreasoning state of mind, that the dog had followed him hither and was about to enter with him.

"Hi, Jet! come here, old fellow!" he cried, snapping his fingers; "come along, poor fellow!" he murmured; but the dog, if such it was, made no response, such as is given to dogs to utter—no whine, or wagging of the cocked tail — but there it stood fluttering on the gray gravel, melted almost into the darkness.

On this hearty night Kent would have slept in a grave-yard or rifled a grave—nothing could daunt him. So he dived into the darkness with outstretched hand, and, in the grasp of his open palm, he inclosed two little warm human arms and a drenched fold of flannel.

"What the devil are you?" cried he. "Is this Coleman's brat?"

"It's me, daddy," whispered a small husky voice. "Don't kill me."

"Hulloa! it's you, is it? Did you ever see me before, young impudence?"

No answer did the little stranger venture to this rough query, except to whisper with a shiver, "Mother's dead, daddy."

"Eh, Lucy? d—n it, no! So you're her young 'un. Come in, you bit of a scamp." Seizing the little figure, he lifted it by one arm and shut the door with a slam.

"There, catch hold of my coat-tail; I suppose I must find some candle-box or pie-dish to stow you in to-night. Hold my tail firm with your two hands, or the bogie will eat you."

Thus singularly situated, he found himself in inner darkness, endeavoring to calculate the exact position of the hall table, on which, in a properly ordered establishment, should be left a bedchamber candlestick and matches for the master returning from his revels.

While he had the wind to lean against, and while the cool yeasty air beat about his face, he was steady enough as to brain and legs, but in the close, still darkness of the hall he felt that to describe a right line to the table, the direction of which he had calculated, would be probably a failure; so he laid his hand against the wall and went groping toward it, smiling broadly, if you could only have seen him, at the tricksy thought of the young thing at his wake. He arrived at the hat-rack, and moved on dauntlessly with extended hands till he came to the hall table. There was, indeed, no candle left for him by careful wife or servant; instead, he laid his outspread palm on the hand-bell, and gave vent to his irritation by a curse at the old mistress. He vowed he had never seen the hall table without a spare candle before, but on this, the very night of his return home. She could think of no one but that cursed bankrupt and his wife.

"I have taken the first step with that chap," he muttered: "I'll take the second with him sharp."

There was no great distance to cross from the hall table to the head of the kitchen stairs, and Mr. Kent traversed it in safety, and so did his tiny companion.

He proceeded down stairs, conscious still of a little trembling grasp on his skirt; and as he made his lumbering way through the darkness, it struck him as an exceedingly comical situation —perplexing, but very comical.

"So you are her young 'un? Why, kiddy, I thought you were lodged safe ten miles away; but, whether you dropped from the rain-clouds or bolted up from the door-mat, come down to the kitchen fire till I have a look at you. Wow! why, you are as wet as a wisp," he said, laying his hand on the little shoulder.

He came to the kitchen door with somewhat more caution than he had hitherto employed, made his way across the tiled floor, much steadied by the start he had received, and ever as he moved in the dark he could feel the nervous pluck at his tail, till he came in sight of the fire, which had till then

been hidden behind the lofty trestle bench. The coals were dull and low, and, as Kent stirred them up, displayed only a few lurid gleams of blackness; but, thrusting his hand into the arch of the boiler, he drew out a bundle of firewood and greasy rag stored there by the cook, which, having been inserted between the bars, soon lighted up into a cheerful crackling blaze. Meantime kiddy stood patiently in her rags behind.

"Now let's have a look at you, you sprite," said he. "By heavens! a comely little lassie enough, and a little foxy head, as like mine as a pearlseed is to a big crown pearl. Sit ye down on your little hams and warm ye."

He placed the child at one side of the grate, in the full glance of the fire, and drawing one end of the trestle close to the hearth, he threw off his oilcloth cape: disencumbered thus, he sat down to examine the little white-cheeked scrap of mortality beside him with a whimsical curiosity.

"How in the name of blue blazes did you find your way here, you poor little devil?"

The child looked up in his face with a keen wistfulness.

"Mrs. Mobbit that had me left me here this morning when mother was dead. She heard as you was comin' back to-day. I've been a hiding among the trees all the day, since Mrs. Mobbit left me."

"Mrs. Mobbit, I'm obliged to 'ee, ma'am," said Kent. "Well, kiddy, your mother ain't dead; she has only left this house, and I'll have her back in a day or so. Blow your little shiny red nose in your petticoat and be happy."

"Mother died in hospital yester morning, daddy," said the child, with dry glittering eyes.

"Eh, died? the devil she did! I wouldn't give a sixpence for my old wife's neck if that be true," he said, in sudden earnest. "What was your mother's name?"

"I called her mammy," said the child, simply.

"Where did she live?" he said, in some excitement.

"Mother lived here."

He *whistled a long low* note, which *was replied to by a long low* awakening snore from the little room adjoining the kitchen. Kent never noticed it; he seemed absorbed by the news he had heard, and sunk in fuddled regret. It was rather lucky for him this sad silence which he preserved; nor would it be a very fanciful straining of a figure if we should say that the regret for poor Lucy, unrefined and unworthy as it came from him, was a sort of guardian during some moments of unquestionable peril; for it so happened that, while Kent was sorrowing with his eyes fixed upon his child, and both quite motionless and silent, old Michael had opened his eyes, and his gnarly fingers had groped for his stick. The crisis lasted for full two minutes; one word or one movement on the part of Kent, and old Michael might have stolen in behind him like a treacherous Celt, and laid a double-handed blow of his ash stick across his enemy's skull. But Jamaica rum was heavy upon Michael's soul, and, having listened drowsily for a spell, he turned over in tipsy slumber.

"Were you with your mammy when she was dying?" asked Kent.

"I was abed wi' her," said the child.

"It was that cough that killed her—eh, kiddy?"

"And an awful bleeding of the nose and mouth, daddy."

Kiddy was steaming so hard in the heat of the fire that she seemed going off bodily into vapor. She kept looking so keen and hard at Kent that, notwithstanding the affecting nature of the preceding dialogue, he could not help tipping her a wink. Of a sudden kiddy grinned up brightly in his face.

"Babies can't be drowned like blind puppies, or I know where you'd have been long ago," said he. "Would you like a bit to eat, kiddy?"

Wouldn't she? Kiddy looked ravenously at a packet of sandwiches he drew out of his side pocket. He handed over one of the slices to the child, which it gobbled up with its two hands and mouth—you could scarcely tell which were gobbling that sandwich. It was quite evident that whoever had the ordering of kiddy's dinner that day had forgotten the trifling duty. He gave her another sandwich, just as he would feed a pet dog, and that disappeared with the same marvelous celerity.

"Manners, kiddy, manners! I'll give 'ee all I've got if you eat it nicely and don't throw the crumbs on the carpet." Here he handed over the whole packet, and the child restrained its ravening little fingers, and, in literal compliance with his jesting command, flapped away the crumbs with its petticoat from the dirty hearthstone. He took out his pipe, and, deliberately filling it, tumbled a bit of red coal on the ashes atop. Then he leaned back comfortably, one leg stretched along the trestle bench, and looked contemplatively through his whiffs at his new acquaintance.

"Come, kiddy," he said, presently, "have a drop to keep that down." He beckoned to her, and, taking a flask from his breast pocket, he unscrewed the top. The child stood up and came over readily, and he put the mouth of the vessel to its pouted lips.

"Oh ho! good stuff that, my duck," he said, as the child drew back its head breathlessly at the pungency of the liquor. "If you're a true chick of mine you'll relish that."

It drank two or three little gulps, and with a queer grimace spat out the drink on the flags, upon which Kent emitted a full-bodied laugh which rang through the kitchen.

The fierce gray eyes have opened again in the adjoining room; the gnarly fingers are drowsily groping for the stick. Now one word, and there will be murder here; we shall have the whole house come screaming about us now in a few seconds. Listen there within.

After his little joke, Kent put the flask into his pocket again. He replaced his pipe in his mouth, and, throwing a heavy arm round kiddy affectionately, pressed its slim waist close to him. He was beginning to take a sort of random fancy to it, and with half closed eyes he gazed on it with the instinct of kin stirring in his blood.

Again the strong Jamaica settled down upon old Michael; his hand sank, his mouth opened grimly, and his heavy eyelids closed. We can not hope for the same luck next time, for each disturbance has left its effect and lightened his sleep. This reckless man, delighting himself with his offspring, must waken the intractable sleeper to vengeance at last.

All this while the storm is racketing without; all this time, during the interesting domestic scene which has been enacting, I warrant you there is a great black jubilee of wind and rain over the roof to-night.

"So mother's dead, kiddy?" he said, giving its waist another loving squeeze. "Was she very fond of you?"

"What, mammy? She gave me all the sugar she had to put in her gruel."

"She gave you all the sugar, did she? Then she must have been precious fond of you."

"And she said she was agoin' to a gran' goold home, and she wished dearly she could take me there too."

"You've found your way to a grand goold home, it seems to me, kiddy, without her help. Did she say any thing to you about me?"

"Ees," whispered the child.

"What was that, kiddy?"

"She said if I saw a big comely man wi' a red whisker like yourn a riding a white nag down the road—"

"Ay, ay, what then?"

"And a passin' me by," continued the child.

"Ay, ay, ay."

"She told me I wur to make a courtesy and roon back to the house door."

"You were to scuttle away from me," said Kent. "Poor Lucy! Well—any thing else?"

"Ees; if I saw'ee a looking at me, or ye ever stopped at my side to speak to me—"

"Ay, ay, what were you to do then?"

The child suddenly stretched its neck toward him, and puckered up its pale lips.

"She told me I was to gi'e you this kiss fro' her."

Kent stooped and took the dead mother's kiss off the child's lips, and it thrilled through his besotted frame, that kiss, so that he was surprised into a heavy sorrow.

"Poor Lucy! poor thing, poor thing!" he said, uttering that pitiful sound of the tongue against the palate.

"Give us another kiss, kiddy, from yourself," said he. "I'll make a lady of you, and maybe you'll be riding in your coach by-and-by."

He lifted the child on his knee, and began dandling it before the fire and

cuddling it. When in the midst of his caresses there came steps up to the kitchen door, a finger fell upon the latch, and a ray of candlelight shot in.

"Trot, trot, my cob horse, trot, trot again," hummed Kent, in droll abandonment. "How many miles to Derby—threescore and ten."

There are three in the kitchen. Like an apparition, standing almost at his side, was the old mistress, frowning on him with uplifted candle.

He turned on her with a broad undaunted smile, Kiddy's thin hand being entangled in his thick red whisker.

The old woman stood there as if her tongue were chained, staring sternly from him to the child.

"It's all right," said he. "Why do you look at us like that?"

"What's the meaning of this, Kent?" she said, in a smothered voice.

"This here is a very wise child, old lady," he said, with assured solemnity; "she knows her own father. Ay, you might make a guess yourself. See this little foxy poll; twill curl as prettily as Coleman's brat's, I promise 'ee; I'll have no favorites here. If you want a pet, here's my little daughter; she only wants a good wash and bit of pomatum to make two of that young pup. Well, she don't seem to fancy you overmuch. Ay, you owe her something, old lady, for, as well as I can make out, you murdered her mother when you beat her like a slave-driver up stairs. You just dare to give this child of mine a rough word or look, and, mind you well, I'll prosecute you before the county—mind ye that. Oh, bless you! we don't care for your wild-cat looks, do we, Kiddy?"

She glared at him without one word, though by the working in her throat she seemed as though she wanted to speak.

"You may call your son down now, and I'll tell him the same to his teeth. I hope he liked the billet I sent him; and he'll have another spoke in his wheel if that don't take effect. Now I think of it, old lady, you make sure to leave me a candle and matches next time I come home; I'm the master of this house, and I'll be treated as such."

She turned from him without a word, recrossed the kitchen, and closed the door after her.

"*That's my mother*, Kiddy; how d'ye like her?" said he. "She ain't so kind to me as your mammy was to you, I promise 'ee; she dont give me the sugar out of her gruel. And so your poor mammy died day before yesterday? God bless me! I'm sorry I heard it just now, young 'un, it has gone near sickening me. I'm d— sorry I came home to-night."

He sat there moodily for a while, involuntarily rocking the child backward and forward, and staring at the fire. At last he put it quietly down, laid his pipe on the bench, and began forming sentences, half to himself and half to the gazing child.

"I'm deuced wretched about that poor girl to-night. I'm fretting for your poor mammy, my kid, and I don't see how I'm to shake it off while I live in this d— house. I was the only one on the face of the earth as cared for her, and she knew it and said it—yes, by G—d, she said it. 'I've given up all for you, Hugh,' she said, 'home, and father, and friends, and maybe my soul,' said she, sobbing; 'but, oh Hugh! you must stand between me and shame;' and I stood to her right trusty. Her own father deserted her, and would have left her to starve; and I was father, mother, and friend to your poor mammy. . . . . I've nothing to reproach myself with in this business: I got her a good place under my own eye; I took her part; and if she'd only have waited on this contrary world a while, I'd have got her a husband, and established her honestly with my own money, when that old Irish rascal, Kiddy, your grandfather, wouldn't give her sixpence to save her soul—an old fellow with a nose like a horse and a brogue like the wind in the chimney. . . . . I feel awful wretched; I don't know what's come over me; I came home as gay as a grig, and left pleasant company to come here."

He lighted his pipe presently again, and sat in gloomy thought, every now and then passing his hand impatiently through his hair.

"Now it's coming on me," he muttered; "I didn't think much of the news when I heard it first, but it's lying like lead on me now. Well, well, it's no good sitting in this dark hole with a tune like that in the chimney. Come, Kiddy, I'll make you up a bed near th

fire; you'll sleep like a young pike basking in the sun."

He got up, and, finding a piece of candle on the dresser, lighted it, and proceeded to collect any thing in the shape of covering which he could lay hands on. He drew forth the fair new table-cloth from the drawer, and took the cook's woolen shawl which hung upon the door. With these simple materials he extemporized a bed on the bench, and laid the limber little figure upon it, placing his own velveteen shooting-jacket rolled up softly beneath its head for a bolster, while over all, after a shake or two to scatter off the rain, he spread his oilcloth cape.

"Good-night to 'ee," he said, stooping over the child and kissing its cheek; but Kiddy flung her arms eagerly round his neck and clung to him trembling.

"Do not quit o' me—do not; I'm afeard o' the awsome old lady."

"Don't 'ee mind that old lady; I'd wring her neck if she touched 'ee—there, you silly, lie still."

"I'm 'feard—I'm awful 'feard of her."

"Hush-a-bye baby! she's gone away to bed. There, curl yourself up, and I'll buy 'ee a new frock, and a new ball, and a box of lollypops to-morrow."

With difficulty he unfastened the little clutch from his neck, and he soothingly rearranged the tossed clothes.

"Come, be asleep before I've finished my pipe, and I'll sit with 'ee a while; thou'rt the sharpest kid I ever met, and I'll make your fortune." He added to himself: "I'd think poor Lucy was looking at me out of those keen little eyes."

He smoked on tranquilly for some minutes, lurched a little aside, and nodded; then roused himself, and took a startled look at the child.

"By heavens! I'd feel as if I saw Lucy standing over her kid there if I was to stay much longer here."

He bent over and looked in the child's e. The eyes were closed, and it was thing heavily, fast asleep; so he up without noise, and, taking the ıle, went over to the kitchen door, ɔking before him with stupid watery ɣes. He opened the door and passed he room where lay his sleeping enemy, *ho lay half conscious* of his vicinity, *and muttering* his nightmare indigna*tion, but his old head* linked to his pillow by the leaden chain of a sick headache and fever-sleep. Alas for the pathos of that obstacle to a father's vengeance! Be it said of him he had a great heart and a great spirit, but a quart bottle of Jamaica subdued them both. Sick headache murders pathos; heroism sinks beneath it. "A plague on both the Houses!" moaned the devoted Pitt, when caught in a Channel swell off Dover, his heart in his heaving stomach.

Kent proceeded up stairs solemnly, and fetched a heavy sigh on the landing, where he poised for a few seconds. There was a weight upon his spirits, which seemed to increase, and was all the more remarkable in that he was a light, elastic-tempered man. Wall-eyed and heavy he lumbered up the last flight: how dreary and doomful those treads through the house in the dead of the night! He has entered his room and closed the door behind him. I think that man will be with poor Lucy to-night in his dreams.

Soundly slept Kiddy through the rumble of angry voices. It never heard that heavy doomful tread on the stairs or that closing of the door. All is past; and the windows may rattle, the house may rock, but Kiddy sleeps sweetly on.

Draussen geht der Wind.

Without stalks the wind. Hush-a-bye, poor little ragged waif! does its bogie scream pierce through your summer-cloud dreams? The wind will not hurt you: sleep on your wee mottled arm, soundly and sweetly after the cold and the rain. Out falls a merry cinder with a chink, up springs a jet of coal gas with a song. Hush! is that a bird, or a little moving shadow? Here comes a rat into the firelight; see the glint from its little keen eyes; how stiff is its skewer-like tail! it comes over to the foot of the bench, and up it climbs with a little scratching sound. Why, it is right among Kiddy's feet this moment, and may presently emerge at the chin and peep down Kiddy's throat. Hark! hark! another is on the dresser, stealing, winding among the plates. There's another chirping behind the skirting. How poor Kiddy would sing out now if she saw her uncanny bedfellow crawling toward her throat. Infants have been killed by rats before now,

and mothers believe the tale. Where is the mother now? "Mammy," it murmurs plaintively, and like a shadow the animal has gone.

There is a charmed circle round the orphan. Those misty blue eyes are near in the darkness. Let us believe they are for once. Hush-a-bye, Kiddy, the rats won't touch you; they are well fed, and sleek, and wanton; they play and chirp about, and will not hurt you. But see the big black rolling clouds out there; if one of these come in your dream, it will sweep your wee corpus away with it, and no one will miss you. Keep your eyelids close shut; a giant is snoring within there with a fee-faw-fum snore. Awful sights and sounds are around you, for such a desolate little body to hear and see; keep close asleep.

Here comes a step, and the door is creaking open, and the candle-light shoots in again. Away fly the rats like magic. Who comes with this light, stealthy tread? It is the fierce old lady again; and where, in life, has she been lurking all this time? She has stolen in slyly and heedfully like the rats. She is standing over you this moment, that terrible old granny; those waxen lids are all that divide you from the sight.

The old lady gazed a moment with her white-jowled face bent down, and she turned quickly and looked hither and thither through the kitchen. Perchance she was looking for another shawl to make the little bed more snug. She went over to the recess beside the dresser; she stole on into the little scullery, and took down a hatchet from the shelf within. Mother, tearful mother, you are lying in your shroud ten miles away!

Granny laid the candle on the table; she came quickly to the trestle bench, and overshadowed the child, and the shadow spread and branched up over wall and ceiling; its ghostly arms were upraised, and the shutters were rattling, and the clouds were rolling, and the bogie wind was screaming, and the little head slept beneath that menacing shadow in its nest of hair.

"Mammy," it lisped, and curled up its bit of a hand, as if shrinking from the slaughter.

"*Lor a mercy! I can't do it*; that's the way my Willie used to curl his hand asleep," muttered the old woman, lowering her arms.

You can not, old lady, if you tried; there is a charmed circle round the orphan. I say the sheeted mother herself would totter in on you to save it before you struck that blow.

"It ain't the child, it ain't the child," she muttered, and moved aimlessly about the flagged floor for a few seconds; then, taking up the candle, she went out of the room.

See her square form going up the stairs with a candle in her hand, and something grasped beneath her frills—up, up into the shadow of the doubling stairs!

CHAPTER XVI.

Coleman and Eleanor still upon their vigil. The murmurs of Kent had ceased for about half an hour. They had heard Mrs. Kent go down, and still waited, expecting to hear her return.

"Do you know, Nell," said Coleman, at length breaking their long and painful silence, "I am quite certain my mother must have gone up without noise — indeed, I almost think I heard her go by."

"I should be greatly relieved if I could think it, Will. I was just making up my mind to go up, if you'd come with me."

He half rose from his chair, for at the moment he heard indistinctly the old man talking fiercely in his sleep.

"There's Michael awake at last. No great harm can come of it, Nell; just let go my arm."

"But you may be sure I won't," she said, holding him firmly. "Stay with me, Will; we can not help it if they quarrel."

But Michael's mutterings died away like the mutterings of the storm, and Coleman sat down a second time relieved; then they heard Kent coming up slowly—heavy, lonesome treads. Eleanor could do nothing now but listen. They heard him go up to the bedroom and shut the door; then Coleman grew calm again, and kept gently stroking Eleanor's hair with his palm.

"All just as I could wish it; he is gone up quietly; he will sleep soundly

once he lies down, and Johnnie won't waken till morning. Now, were you not a goose, Nell?"

He stirred up the fire, and added cheerfully, "We'll just stay where we are half an hour longer, and then we'll slip off to roost like the rest. This is the last anxious night, keep that in mind; 'Joy comes with the morning.'"

He leaned back his head, and presently seemed to be dozing, but he was listening anxiously still, and so was poor sleepless Eleanor.

"There's your mother," she said, suddenly; "there's your mother going up only now; my child has been alone with that dreadful man ever since. What could have kept her, Will? You said you heard her go up."

"I'll just go out and say a few words to her, Nell; do you stop here."

"Oh, don't delay her—let her go up; I am impatient till she is up stairs with the child," entreated Eleanor. And he gave way to her, for by certain heavy breathings up stairs, which had continued some time back, he knew that Kent was in a deep intoxicated sleep. Those breathings seemed to respond to other stentorian snores below stairs, like two tigers purring.

The candle-light pierced through the keyhole into the darkened sitting-room, and vanished like a fairy wand. The two crazy stairs creaked again under the cautious steps of the old lady, going lightly up; they could hear the bedroom door open up stairs, and they could count her steps across the room.

There was a sudden pausing in the winds abroad as they were mustering for another rush; the windows ceased to rattle, and the dark trees to writhe. There was a sound as of a heavy slushy stroke up stairs, and two groans were fearfully audible. Then came the winds dashing over the hill; the joists of the house mimicked the sound of the groaning, and the great leafless beech-tree without looked like a Gorgon's head just startled from slumber—all writhing.

Up leaped Coleman, and his wife clung to him. They hastened across the room, and jostled up the dark stairs, and they both burst blindly into *Mrs. Kent's chamber.* All was quiet *there—a silence of horror.* On the bed *lay Kent in his clothes,* his long limbs straggling over the quilt, and on his forehead was a red cleft, and a slender stream of blood.

Coleman and his wife saw that wound right well. By the bed stood the old woman, the hatchet suspended in her two hands as she stood gazing upon her deed. Coleman and his wife saw her as plainly as God saw her.

"Go out of the room, Nellie," he whispered, taking her by the arms and putting her quickly out behind him. He closed the door, so that she was left in the darkness leaning against the door-post, a woman wrapped in nightmare. She heard her husband's voice within saying, "Good God! mother, why have you done this?"

In a moment after the door was opened again, and he stood at it with his mother by the arm. He held the weapon he had snatched from her in his other hand as he put her forth.

"Go down to the sitting-room; I shall follow you, mother—go down." The old woman went past Eleanor, touching her with her skirt. Eleanor distinctly saw her go by her, red-handed, and she heard her passing down stairs. So far she was powerless to take any part in this almost incredible event; but when she heard her husband lock the door within, then she awoke to active terror. Her child! she had not looked toward the cot, and she instantly accepted the notion that her child was killed too.

"Will, Will, the child! open. Oh God! my child—is it safe—is it safe? Johnnie, Johnnie, Johnnie."

She clamored at the door, and beat it with her hands, and up came the servants in alarm and clustered round her. What was the matter? Was the house afire? Was the old mistress dead? But Eleanor never heeded their questions; half wild with terror, she clamored at the door and beat its panels.

It opened and she rushed in, while Coleman sternly withstood the entrance of the servants. Johnnie was unhurt, and was sitting up in his bed. Eleanor caught him to her bosom, and fled away with him from the room. She broke through the servants who thronged the door, and never stopped until she was within her own room, with all the security which could be given by lock or bolt. There, sobbing and whispering

silly questions to the child, she wrapped around him the blanket from the bed, and so sat in the dark to defend him with her life.

Meanwhile Coleman had left his mother's room also in all the calmness of desperation, and, taking the key from the inside keyhole, he locked the door.

"There has been a murder in the house," he said, confronting the half-dressed, shivering throng, among whom old Michael was foremost; "there has been murder done here, but the assassins seem to have escaped. Dress as fast as you can, Peter," he said, addressing a stable-boy, "and go to the police barracks; send the sergeant here at once."

"Mr. Bryan here is dressed, sir," said the lad; "he'd be faster than I."

"Do as you are bid," said Coleman, with a passionate abruptness; "you dress and go. All the rest of you go quietly down stairs; there is nothing farther to be done here."

He passed them with the candle in his hand, leaving them to disperse at their leisure, and went down stairs in haste to the sitting-room. There he found his mother standing in the middle of the floor. She turned her face upon him as he entered.

"Is that you, Will?" she muttered, as if she scarcely saw him. "I am ready to give myself up."

He shut the door, and drew her over to the fire with a grasp which must have bruised a more delicate wrist. She gave with him wherever he chose to lead her, and sat where he pleased.

"Mother," he said, his two hands grasping her arm with imperative energy, "you must never say such words again. What's done *is* done. You must now absolutely pledge yourself to me, in these few moments we have together, that you will be silent, and under my direction. Do you hear me?"

"I knew I should do it at last; he girned up at me in his sleep as if he wished to insult me again."

"Are you mad, mother?" He tightened his grasp on her arm so as to pain her, and even shook her with some violence.

"Can you hear me and understand me, mother? This must not be. Whatever comes of it, you must be saved."

"I don't care to live, Will—I'm not fit to live; but he drove me to it—he drove me to it—that I'll say to my dying day. Eh, law! you'll wrench out my arm."

He let her go.

"Mother, are you prepared to die on the gallows, with vulgar crowds watching your shameful death—your deed in every newspaper, and your name upon every foul tongue?"

"Tut! you can not frighten me; what I sow I'll not fear to reap. It becomes you rarely to speak such words to me."

"You don't know what it costs me, mother. I tell you this will not do; if you will not listen to me and absolutely pledge yourself to obey my advice, I'll daub myself with that man's blood and give myself up."

"I'm come to that pass," she replied, driftlessly, "I care not what happens. They're welcome to me, and the whole country are welcome to me, if they chose to drag me through the town."

"Mother," he said, with a sudden softness which attracted her attention, "think of the stain you are about to fasten on your poor little grandchild; he can never recover from it. The old and worn may shun the world and hide; Eleanor and I may hide from the disgrace; but you might as well leave your curse to that innocent child who loves you."

The old woman seemed struck in all her hardness; she grew attentive.

"That boy will be ruined by it, and branded by it," continued her son; "he will be shunned and bullied till he grows to hate your memory."

"'Twill hardly come to that," said Mrs. Kent.

"I say it must, unless you consent to be ruled by me. We've but five minutes to talk it over. Will you listen, or will you ruin your grandchild?"

"What's to be done, Will? I'll listen to you."

"Then I say to you now, mother, *it was not you* who committed this crime; you were down stairs here in the sitting-room with my wife and me. We heard some one raising your bedroom window from the outside, and a few minutes after we heard a blow struck, and somebody groaning. I went up stairs to see what had happened. That

all you know of this night's work. Repeat that after me word for word."

"I never hid behind a trick, Will; I can not say all that—no fool would believe me."

"Yet you concealed your approaching marriage from me so as to deceive me completely. Oh, mother! I do not want to reproach, but to save you, and me, and Johnnie from shame."

"If I say I was not in the room, and you were there, they will make you a prisoner, and that shall not be. I say saddle the right horse and ha' done wi' it."

"I am quite safe; I am innocent, and nothing could touch me," said he: "no one in the house is in possible danger but you. Mother, be led by me."

"What is this story I'm to tell? Say it you before me," she said, with a rising anxiety.

He repeated it word for word, and she followed him till she had it all like a parrot.

"Now, mother, dear mother," he said, "keep strictly to that: they may try to bully you, but while you say nothing more or less than what I have told you, you are safe. Sit there by the fire; I must go to that room again; you must not stir from this till I return."

He left her, and, going to the window, opened it as gradually and noiselessly as he could. When it was sufficiently raised to allow him to pass under, he stepped on the window-sill and leaped out on the wet grass below. Through the blustering weather he made way around the house. The east was just troubled with morning, and there was just a gray gleam on the hill-side, by which he could guide his feet.

Coming to the stone steps which ascended the elevated ground round the house, he climbed them and stood upon the brink of the parapet which faced the bedroom window. There was a little wooden palisade, formed of deal boards nailed to short posts, erected along the edge; this he tore up, and laid across from the coping to the window-sill, forming thus a frail and precarious bridge, which bent under him as he knelt on it and crept across. Taking out his pocket-knife and opening the strong blade, he inserted it between the two sashes, and contrived by a succession of gradual efforts to force aside the iron bolt; then, lifting the lower sash, he stepped noiselessly into the black deserted room. He was not very familiar with it, and as he proceeded he got confused as to the part of the room in which he stood. Putting out his hand quickly, he laid it on something clammy and cool—the head or the forehead of the dead man, he did not know which; but it told him where he was. He passed his hand down the body to the waistcoat pocket, and drew from it watch and chain; he took from the trowsers pocket a handful of coin, withdrawing his hand in palsied haste; and with these spoils he went heedfully groping back to the window. The curtains rustled fiercely behind him, as if one were rising from the bed to pursue him. Some of the coin he dropped on the sill, and some down between the parapet and the house, as it might have fallen from a fugitive. With his knee he deliberately broke a pane of glass, and scraped the paint of the sash outside with his knife, to show some plausible indications of an assassin's entrance; then, before climbing out again, he looked up the dark hill anxiously, for he fancied he heard human voices on the wind. On the hill-top he could see lanterns like Will-o'wisps: the police had been summoned by his own orders, and here they are coming down the orchard path to surprise him; if he be not quick he will be taken unawares, and all will be lost.

He got out on the window-sill hurriedly, and softly closed the window behind him. Standing there without, he flung the watch and chain away among the long grass, and the rest of the coin after it, and was just about to cross over the bridge he constructed again, when he suddenly remembered he had left the hatchet somewhere in the room; the servants would be sure to recognize it, and all his precautions would be without avail. He opened the window hastily again, almost unnerved by the desperate emergency, and he clambered in, trying to remember where he had laid it. It was not on the bed; he felt the quilt all over twice, shuddering at what *was* there. It was not on the chairs; he felt their seats one after another. He made his desperate way to the table, muttering, "I shall be late, I shall be late." It

was not on the table. He looked out toward the hill: here come the lanterns, and he can wait no longer; if he is caught here to-night, having entered by the window, and, for all he knew, tracking the room over with blood-prints, all will be lost. He made his way to the window again and knocked his foot against something hard in his way; there lay the hatchet for which he had been losing precious time—risking life and honor. Snatching it up, he sprang toward the window; the lights seemed dancing down the hill, their nearness exaggerated by their gleams: they were within a hundred yards of him. He stood upon the window-sill, and stooped to cross to the parapet, when, to his horror, the area yawned beneath him, and the wooden bridge was gone!

He stood there helpless: the edge of the parapet was nine feet from him, and a leap was out of the question; below there was a fall of twenty feet on hard paving-stones, and he was a heavy man, past the active period of life. But, even if he risked the fall and achieved it unhurt, he would be imprisoned beneath, for brick wall was built on either side. Again, there was no escape behind him, for the door was locked on the outside, and he had left the key in the sitting-room below. Who had done this? He was discovered, and snared, and helpless. Here come the lamps; he can distinguish the forms of tall men among the trees; and right across the parapet, a few yards away, stood a dark figure confronting him — prying over at him, it's drapery waving in the wind.

"Who is there?" said Coleman.

"Musha, is that the masther? Well, well, I didn't dhrame it was you when I moved the board."

"Put it back, for God's sake! quick, man, if I ever did you a kindness."

Michael without another word shot out the railing till it reached the window.

"Catch hoult of my stick, Masther William — 'twill studdy you. Blood alive, dear! how did you come there?"

Coleman lost not a moment; he laid one foot midway on the boards and sprang over to old Michael's side.

"I don't ax any question, Masther Will," whispered Michael, "and if I partly guess what you've been a doin' in there wid that instrument in your hand, it shall never go beyond a guess; it's no business of mine to know, and I wish you well out of it."

A thought flashed into the ferment of Coleman's brain. Here is a ram caught in the thicket—ready to be sacrificed to his desperate purpose. This man has been sitting up, with a cudgel by his side, for these two nights, with the open avowed intention of making a murderous assault upon Kent whenever he came home; his design was known to the whole house; they could all swear to it; and now, should Coleman but place the hatchet in his hand on some pretense, and run round the house from him, the police would catch him on the spot; all the world would believe him to be the assassin, and the wretched old mother would be saved. No sooner had the temptation entered his mind, than, shocked by the suggestion, he crushed it down.

"Michael," he said, "here are the police behind you coming down the hill. Go to meet them—say I sent you to hurry them. Look alive, man; don't stand stupidly staring here."

He took the old man by the shoulder, swung him round, and pushed him onward toward the path; then stooping lest his figure might be seen against the whitewashed house, he went down the stone steps to the gravel. Here he stopped a moment to wrench off the iron head of the hatchet against the flag, and, having worked it off, he flung it with all his might in the direction of the river; he listened, and fancied he heard a faint splash beyond the trees. Even if that be found it is no great risk, for it was by the handle the instrument was recognizable. The handle he thought of burning in the bright fire within; but a moment's consideration showed him that this mode of disposing of it was not rapid enough—not a moment remained for mature precaution. He climbed into the sitting-room to his mother, who stood at the window staring forth vacantly, and, opening the shutter behind her, he dropped the piece of wood into the pulley-hole, hiding it thus for the present. He next made an effort to close the casement, but the wood had swelled with the rain, and resisted his utmost efforts. The firelight shot out a long radiance into the gloom, like the sword of an angel

and on the broad, checkered square of light upon the grass the tell-tale shadows of his mother and himself were imaged full three yards abroad; they must stand where they are and face it out, for here comes the men round the corner of the house, and they are discovered.

Coleman put his arm about his mother's waist, and boldly confronted the police, in full possession of his cold business intelligence.

Scarcely had he taken up his position, when the sergeant, two policemen, Michael, and the lad he had first sent, stood before him on the grass.

"Sergeant," he said, "I am obliged to you for your promptitude in coming. We have had a terrible business here. Mr. Kent's room has been broken into during the night, and he has been foully murdered in his bed. I have made a hasty inspection of the premises, and there is every indication of an entry by the window and of a hasty escape. If you will step round to the hall door I will let you in, and you shall examine for yourselves. My mother has been very much agitated, and I was obliged to give her air."

The sergeant was quite respectful, and with some hasty expressions of sympathy he and his party went round to the hall door out of sight. Then, by a desperate effort, Coleman tore down the window-sash and adjusted the screw; but the shutters he left open, with a jealous precaution lest the orifice might be seen in which lay the evidence of his mother's guilt. He drew the curtains close, however, and, bringing Mrs. Kent over to the fire, placed her sitting on one of the arm-chairs.

"Now, mother, as you love me and poor innocent little Johnnie, be calm, and keep repeating the words I taught you over and over. Don't go a hair's breadth beyond them, or short of them, and you will be safe—all will go well."

With these last imploring words he ran up to his wife in the utmost haste, shading the candle-flame with his hand lest it might be blown out. He took the handle of the door and strove to open it, but he found it locked within.

"Nellie," he muttered, "Nellie, for God's sake, quick! I have brought you a candle; let me in; I have a word to say to you."

She instantly came across and opened the door.

"The police have come, Will," she said, with a gasp.

He came in and glanced round the room: she had stowed her little son away in the big bed, and beside him was the pressure of where she had just been lying.

"Eleanor," he whispered, "come here into the dressing-room; I have something to say to you. No one must hear but you. There, the child is well enough; he is quiet—come."

He left the candle on the table, so that the child, who lay where his mother had left him, might not be frightened in the dark, and he pulled in Eleanor with him into the little closet which opened from the room.

"Hush! I've but time for a single word—there is no time for you to talk. Listen, darling—they are the words of life and death."

"I am listening, Will," she said, all in a tremble.

He kept looking at her for a few seconds, as if, since there was no time to reason with her, he would give the utmost impressiveness to what was coming.

"Nellie, do you remember all that passed to-night? Tell me all that passed; I will correct you if you go wrong."

"I—I am so bewildered, love—I am so—"

"I see you are, my darling girl; you can recollect nothing: I will tell you all you have seen. We were sitting up in the parlor to-night—you remember that?"

"Yes, Will, quite."

"You, and I, and mother?"

"Not surely your *mother?*"

"My mother was with us—I see you *are* bewildered, indeed. She sat on the arm-chair, just as she was used to do for many a night in our room. It was her habit."

There came a sudden knock to the hall door, which startled poor Eleanor into increased bewilderment.

"There is no more danger, Will?" she cried.

"Not to you, or me, or the child—awful danger to my mother, Nell! There are the police come to exam

into this affair, and I am determined to save my mother at all hazards. Now you know my mind, Nellie, you must say and swear that my mother sat with us to-night as usual."

"But, oh Will! how can I? You are not serious to make such an awful request?"

"Not serious?"

He took her hand and laid it on his forehead, where the beads of horror stood out.

"I seem calm, Nell, because I must be so, and so must you, darling. You may not be questioned to-night; whenever you are, answer as you please—answer as you can."

There came a long, hasty double knock at the hall door, and his voice began to shake; yet he controlled himself.

"Answer as *you* think fit, Nell, but here is what I shall say and swear to my death: my mother sat with us to-night—we heard a noise of broken glass up stairs—"

Another long, imperative knocking below. It was maddening to human nerves to hear it at such a moment.

"And we all heard a blow and a groan. I ran up and entered the room, and I saw a man escape from the window, dropping something in his haste; then you came up about the child, and I let you in."

"Oh, Will, why should I be brought forward at all? Save me! My evidence is not surely required—oh, save me!"

"For to-night I can save you, my darling, but to-morrow I fear your evidence will be required. You know now what I and my mother—"

Another long, angry knocking below. Where are the servants? The police will enter by the parlor window if there's longer delay, and come upon the wretched, stupefied old woman, muttering to herself by the fire her parrot tale, when her son will not be near to support her.

"You have heard now, darling Nell, what I and my mother will say and swear. Reflect well, and make up your mind by to-morrow. And reflect upon this: I pity you more than words can tell, but I must put this matter to you *in its true light while* we can yet be *private. Honor, life,* my eternal salvation, seem to me just as feathers in the scale against the thought of my mother's death on the scaffold. Now if, after this night's consideration, you implicate her by a word—can you follow me?"

"Yes," she said, dreamily, as if growing faint and sick.

"I can not blame you, but on the day my mother dies"—the beautiful wild face of his wife, turned up to him in the uncertain light, filled him with ruth, and he finished his sentence thus:

"Then may God support you and me."

He let her sink on the floor, her back propped against the wall. The police had begun to knock with the ends of their truncheons, the sergeant's voice could be heard harsh and accusing on the gravel. Coleman went out hastily, leaving the candle behind him, and closing the bedroom door. He descended to the hall, and with a demonstrative leisure he undid the chain, and drew back the bolts, and turned the large key in the hall-door lock; he then opened the door and let in the impatient men. He stood so calm and commanding within, he received them with such seemly dignity, that the sergeant, though inclined to take a very high tone of complaint, touched his hat, and allowed Coleman to speak first.

"You must pardon me," he said, "for keeping you so long, sergeant. This dreadful occurrence has made Mrs. Coleman so ill that I was obliged to attend to her in her bedroom, and prepare her, before I could let you into the house. If you will be good enough to follow me now, I shall first bring you to poor Mr. Kent's room. Step this way—mind the stairs."

Then, turning to Michael, he bade him go down and bring them up a candle, lest the light of the lanterns should not be found sufficient. He went into the sitting-room and took the key from the chimney-piece, without word or signal to his mother, and, returning to the men, he led them up stairs to the bedroom in which lay the deceased. Unlocking the door, he preceded them with a hasty stride, and raised the candle he held in his hand for one anxious glance at the boards, expecting to see his own footprints traced upo

them in common; but the floor was spotless, save for a wedge-shaped stain where the hatchet had been lying. His hatchfood grew. Turning to the sergeant, he pointed in silence to the bed, and waited till the men had satisfied themselves by a long gaze. The candle-light trembled a little over the dead man as he held the candle up, showing that his hand was shaking. None, however, observed it but himself, his manner and tone were so self-possessed.

"It was the stroke of a powerful arm, that blow, sergeant," he said, as they turned away.

"No doubt, sir, no doubt."

"I have great dependence upon your zeal and sagacity, sergeant; Mr. Bruce, the magistrate, was speaking of you the other day as the most active, intelligent officer in the country. I know there is no need of reward to such as you to arouse your energy; but, that this investigation may have every advantage, I offer, in my mother's name, a hundred pounds for the detection of the murderer."

The country Dogberry seemed grimly gratified, and so were his myrmidons. Under Coleman's guidance, they began to examine the evidences presented by the state of the room. The sergeant remarked the broken window, and in a sage and pompous vein suggested that through this 'ere broken pane the burglar got in his arm to undo the bolt.

"I had not thought of that," said Coleman, as if deeply struck. "You are right, it must be so." The myrmidons spoke their approval.

"Here is money," cried one of them, picking up some shillings near the window; "the villains were startled, and dropped it in their escape."

"It got wind, sir, depend upon it," said the sergeant to Coleman, who was profoundly attentive—"it got wind that Mr. Kent had plenty of money about him. Look ye, he has been buying horses, and making a bit of a dash, poor gentleman—am I not correct, sir?"

"I've kept so strictly at home with my mother," said Coleman, "that I may say I heard nothing of his movements; he has been absent from home till to-night; but I have reason to believe your conjecture correct."

"I should like to see how they crossed your area, sir," said the sergeant.

"It's a crabbed point that, sergeant," said old Michael, putting in his word; "I was measuring it with my eye just afore you came up, and there's the bit o' palin' stretched across it that wouldn't support the weight of a rope-dancer."

The sergeant turned his regards on the last speaker, and screwed them into him severely.

"What was you a howerin' about here for, old man, with that there heavy stick? Take warning not to say any thing to criminate yourself. Give me that stick."

He took the stick from Michael's hand, and they all inspected its iron ferule closely.

"No," said the old man—"no, it's nothin' to see, but you'd better smell it."

Dogberry gravely smelled it, and looked to Coleman for countenance.

"Sergeant," said Coleman, cutting short this farce, "let us take your suggestion, and examine the means of entrance." He raised the window, and the policeman, bending on his hands and knees, looked out for some seconds.

"It is as I thought, sir," he said, drawing in his head: "they made use of the bit of paling you had put up there; there are marks of soil on the wood and on the sill, like the prints of feet." He looked down at Michael's shoes as he spoke with very blunt significance.

"Your shoes are wet, my man."

"Bedad they are; and that's strange how we both got wet shoes, sergeant, such a night as this."

"Where did you sleep last night, my man? Be careful."

"I slep' in this coat, to the best of my belief."

"Was you drinking this evening, my man?"

"Do you want me to criminate myself?" said Michael, in angry gibe.

"Are you satisfied with your examination of the place, sergeant?" said Coleman, again interrupting the absurd altercation. "If you are, we may leave the room, which I will lock, and give you the key."

The sergeant expressed himself as so far satisfied with the room—he had his

suspicions about this here party, who had given him such unsatisfactory replies, and would make a note, too, in his book, which he did, and in many respects wrote himself down an ass. Then they all followed Coleman from the room, who held the door open till they had all passed out, and, having locked it, placed the key in the sergeant's hands.

"Now, sergeant," he said, "I am ready to offer you any information in my power which may throw light upon this shocking occurrence, and any of the household will, I am sure, readily offer you the same assistance. Mrs. Kent will tell you all she knows of it if you come down to the sitting-room."

"We'll ask Mrs. Kent a few questions," said the sergeant, almost obsequiously, for Coleman adopted an easy tone, between condescension and flattery, which gradually overcame the policeman. He had as yet made no statement himself, reserving it till his mother had made hers, so that he might entirely adapt his account to whatever she might be led to say. He did not trust her.

The procession then moved down to the sitting-room, where the old lady was sitting over the fire.

"Mother," said he, "here are the police, who would wish to hear what you can tell them, and then the sergeant may have some questions to put to you."

The old lady rose and turned her face to them; her gray hair was much disheveled, her eyes were unsteady, and her cheeks unnaturally flushed by the fire. All the lights were turned upon that wretched old face.

"What want ye?" she said. "Sit ye down, men."

"Mother," said Coleman, alarmed, "these are the police; tell the sergeant all you know of what happened to-night." Then turning to the policemen —"She has been very much shocked, you see, but she will tell you all she saw and heard."

To his surprise and relief, his mother began the story he had taught her, and went through it in a wooden, monotonous tone, and she arrived at the end of her account in safety.

But even while he was congratulating himself, he received a new shock, which more than redoubled his suspense. He had not looked at her in the light before, but suddenly his eyes lit upon something which made his head seem to swim. Right across the top cape of her dressing-gown was a slender spirt of blood. Instantly he withdrew his gaze from it, lest he might guide the eyes of the police; he feared to look at them; he could only watch his mother's face, with a giddy conviction that all eyes in the room must be fastened upon that stain.

"All right, ma'am—all correct," said the sergeant, respectfully. "Could you tell us if Mr. Kent was like to have money about him to-night?"

The question seemed to excite the old lady strangely:

"He had my money about him," she cried; "I care not if all the country know it—he was a robber. He ruined me and insulted me, and I care not what'll become of me."

Coleman passed quickly to her side, and under pretense of supporting her, doubled the cape over her shoulder, so that the mark was concealed. Then he led her to her seat by the fire, and turned to explain her agitation.

She had indeed lost money, he confessed, by Mr. Kent's extravagance, and the possession of that money had, he feared, led to the poor man's death at the hands of some of the country roughs, as indeed the sergeant had so acutely suggested. His mother was ill from the fright, and if they would be so kind as to retire to the kitchen, he would have refreshments for them after their wetting.

While he was speaking, one of the policemen went over to his mother's side, lamp in hand, and, taking the corner of the cape which had been doubled up by Coleman, laid it down again, and exposed the blood.

"How came that stain there?" said he, laying his finger on it; and the sergeant, approaching it, examined it jealously.

"Perhaps you can account for this?" said he, looking awkwardly at Coleman.

"I got it when I was lain beside him," said the old lady, suddenly; "how could I escape a stain, man?"

"She was certainly in the room with me," said Coleman, chilled to the marrow by her words. "I believe she tried to lift her husband's head; she

was so shocked—as indeed I have been myself—that she is wandering a little in her talk. It has been her habit till to-night to sit in the room with us."

"It is my duty to warn you, ma'am," said the sergeant, with painful hesitation, "not to say any thing as may criminate yourself."

"Say nothing now, mother," said Coleman; "our explanations will be better made before the coroner to-morrow. Sergeant, I suppose you must sit here with us to-night?"

"I am sorry to be obliged, sir, to sit here with the lady in performance of my duty; I only hope all will be explained to-morrow."

He laid his hand lightly on the old lady's shoulder, as she sat hunched over the fire, and then, on Coleman's invitation, they all seated themselves to wait for the full daylight. Coleman stood at the window till the morning began to rise, his back turned to them all, and his hands pressed across his eyes from time to time. There was nothing to be said more to-night; all was over and done for the present, whether well or ill. As one who, losing his head for a moment in climbing up a sheer sea-cliff, presses his face blindly into some patch of heather, that for a moment he may forget his awful position, so Coleman pressed his face upon his hand.

CHAPTER XVII.

When Eleanor was left by her husband, she was so frightened and agitated that she lay helplessly propped against the wall, half swooning. Soon she found strength to rise and think, and all her senses became intensely on the alert. What course was she to take if questioned? She could not tell. She rested wholly on the earnest hope that her evidence would not be required, and beyond that hope she feared to look. Her child was safe, her husband safe, and she had leisure now to her own position with the keenest stress. She was conscious of an excitement which braced her strength, and quickened her comprehension of what was taking place down stairs, and what might be its future consequences. She sat by the bed until daylight and the expiring light of the candle began to contend, and till all the house had grown silent as a church-yard; then she timidly rang the bell. The cook and maid came up together to answer her summons, protecting one another, and the former brought her a glass of wine on a tray, which she said Mr. Coleman had sent up to her. Eleanor took it and laid it on the chimney-piece, and forgot it there. She inquired in an anxious whisper what had occurred below. "They've arrested the mistress on suspicion," returned both the servants in eager response; "blood was found on her frills, and the coroner is sent for."

Eleanor dared not ask them any more. She dismissed them with thanks, and when they had closed the door she sat down by the bed again, and strove to conquer an unaccountable sense of relief which was shed through her mind at the tidings. She did not dwell on it sufficiently to find an explanation; she only felt it. There seemed to be some pitfall before herself and her husband while he was resting upon falsehood. Now such falsehoods must be needless. Shocking as were the real facts of the case, so high-wrought had been her distress, that now a reaction set in, which by contrast might be called tranquillity. She even obtained a little dreamless sleep, resting her cheek upon the side of the bed. She awoke about ten o'clock. The rain was still beating against the panes, and as she rose from the chair chilled and confused, the first returning shock of memory was very sickening, but, from a sense of the emergency of her position, she recovered herself. Johnnie was sleeping soundly, and she thought how fortunate it was that he slept. Going to the door then, she opened it a little, and listened.

There was a murmur of voices in the parlor, and among them she thought she recognized her husband's. It was unexcited, and every moment he seemed to be making replies, some short and some lasting full a minute, but all singularly collected and unhesitating compared with that agitating interview with her. She marked particularly, too, the voice which seemed to interrogate him: it was a cold voice, sternly importunate and pressing, to her fancy. In reality, it was but the common official tone of a man engaged upon a solemn inquiry;

but it made Eleanor shudder; to her it seemed cruel. His mother will have no chance, she thought; how ever shall I comfort Will!

In fact, the coroner's inquest was going on below, and the witnesses were being examined one by one. When will her turn come? Perhaps it is come already, and yet she has not made up her mind what course to take. She hurried over to her chair to ponder. Her husband's testimony was given, and she could not now determine what that testimony might be. If it were falsehood, she felt she must be silent; at all hazards, her lips could not form themselves to the falsehood he proposed to her: and was she to be brought forward now to prove him perjured by her silence? She lost command of her mind again, and sickened with anticipation of the emergency. A dismal fancy awoke capriciously in her mind. Those men's voices below, what time and scene did they bring back to her? She remembered sitting up stairs with her sister on the morning of her father's funeral; all the gentlemen were collected below in the parlor at the funeral breakfast; she remembered how she had heard steps coming up to carry down the coffin, and she felt as if they must come presently. As she lives, here they are—many feet crowding up stairs slowly: they are surely coming to take her evidence, and what is she to say or do? Her impulse was to lock the door once again, and she acted breathlessly on the impulse. She flew over to the door with a beating heart and locked them out; they must break it open before they can make her a witness, and meantime she can come to some resolution.

But they have turned into Mrs. Kent's room, and are not seeking her yet. She remembers with returning self-possession that the jury must always view the body, and they had come up for no other purpose.

Presently she heard them coming out again, murmuring remarks to one another, and then descending the stairs with a confusion of heavy steps—the very sound of the men's feet who carried down her father's coffin from landing to landing.

Is that a child's outcry of sorrow or pain? Her own is safe on the bed. Who is this child who takes so loud a part in the morning's solemn work? They are dragging away poor Kiddy from its father's remains, upon which it lay, having probably slipped in with the people; at all events, Kiddy was curled up against the body, her squalid little cheek awfully smeared.

Again Eleanor sat down to await a summons which she was determined to disregard, and she minutely listened to the sounds beneath her, thinking she would hear her name called aloud. As she listened thus to murmurs, and stirrings, and voices below, striving to disentangle and interpret them, she heard a chaise drive up to the door. "It is for the coroner," she said. "Thank God, it is all over."

She went to the window to look out and confirm herself in her hopes, and as she stood there looking down at the vehicle till some one came to fill it, she saw the dismissed jurors going away in pairs and singly. Some of them turned and looked up at the house, as if it were become an object of interest and curiosity, and their eyes infallibly turned to the window at which she stood. She looked unshrinkingly in these men's faces, as though they had been the pages of a book, for she was in no coy or blushing mood this morning. Relieved indeed she was from the ordeal she had apprehended, but on the very kibe of that relief came a reserve of new anxieties. Her poor husband's agony for his mother if it had gone ill with her—how could the wife stem such a grief as that? where slip in the wedge of comfortable talk? He might never lift his head again after the blow—it might prove a wound beyond her cunningest skill.

She heard a man come up to Mrs. Kent's room; by the step she concluded it to be a policeman, and, not fearing now to find out some certain news, she flitted to her door, opened it, and stood at it. The child was sitting up in the bed looking at her.

"Mamma, don't leave me," he said.

"Hush, Johnnie! lie still," she answered, shortly; "I can not attend to you now."

He lay down with docility, almost covering his little golden head with the clothes, while she stood there at the open door waiting till the person w

had entered the dreaded room came out, carrying some women's apparel in his arms—a gown, and cloak, and bonnet—which she recognized as belonging to her mother-in-law.

"Policeman," she said, in an anxious tone, which instantly caught the man's attention, though it was low and awe-struck, "what is the result of the inquest?"

He turned round, and, gazing at her with a peculiar look of pity, answered simply,

"You will see Mr. Coleman in a few moments, ma'am; he will tell you himself." And with these words he went down, grating his strong shoes against the stairs, as if he were descending from a common taproom, and not from a lady's bedchamber.

She still held the door in her hand, and tarried there expectantly; nor had she long to wait. Presently she saw her husband come up, treading lightly two steps at a time; he was smiling, though of course he was pale—pale as ashes after his terrible night; indeed, he could not be much paler than she knew she was herself, but he was smiling as his face rose to her view above the stairs. She caught that smile, and as he stood upon the landing approaching her, it lasted still to comfort her. There was a policeman close behind him, but she thought nothing of that. Her husband embraced her, and kissed her more than once.

"How has the trial gone, love?" she whispered, leading him in with her.

"There has been no trial, Nell; an inquest is only a hasty surface inquiry, and, I need not tell you, there is a deal that wants explanation in last night's sad business. You must not fret—I'm going to leave you for a short time."

"Take me with you," she said, with a gulp.

But he did not answer her then. He went in and hastily threw his cloak about him—a rough traveling cloak—and put on his hat. Presently he went over to the bed, and, withdrawing the clothes for a moment, kissed his little son, and covered him up again. On turning round he perceived Eleanor *getting on her* bonnet and warm shawl *in a sort of flurry.*

"Nellie," he said, going up to her *and gently removing* her bonnet, "I am accompanying my poor mother to Wells, and just at present, you know, you could give me no assistance in supporting and comforting her in her very trying position. There—be a thoughtful good girl, and do what I ask you, for we have not time for discussion. You and Johnnie must start in the afternoon to your sister's; here is a little money for immediate use, and here is the letter, with the post-office order and the check; use it as you see necessary. The check, you see, is made payable at Wells, and Michael will get it cashed for you at once. Now, God bless you! take good care of yourself and Johnnie—that's the way to cheer me just now."

It was an unspeakable relief to her to hear him talk so calmly and almost hopefully—his voice so far from the tragic key, and so like his pleasant daily speech, when there was no dreadful scenes around them save between the covers of novels. Judging from the scene which had harrowed her so cruelly last night, she expected to find him in violent grief.

"Well, I will do whatever you wish. Mind you write me a line every day. I am so grateful to you that you have saved me from appearing this morning. Must you go this moment? I have more to say to you," she added, quickly, as he stooped to give her a farewell kiss; "there are many things, you know—"

"I leave every thing to your management and good sense. God bless you, my darling love! I will write to you when I have any good news."

He caught her in his arms for a moment and embraced her; then he hastily joined the policeman, who was standing all this time with an expression of some embarrassment at the open door.

The door had been shut, Coleman and the policeman were gone, and Eleanor was left standing in the middle of the room, a little overcome by the haste and tender energy of that farewell, when she heard the carriage-door open, and she ran to the window to snatch another reassuring look from her husband. She saw the old lady getting in first, her hand trembling on her son's arm, as he helped her in with an odd and notable respect of mien; then he looked up at the window, and gave his wife such a brave, beaming look—pale also,

no doubt—as he waved his hand to her, that he set her unconsciously smiling again. He then got into the carriage; two policemen followed, and the blinds were pulled close. They drove down the avenue, through the open gate, and rapidly away out of sight.

"Johnnie, darling," she said, "would you like to get up now?" The child appeared listless and heavy; but he sat up, and passed his hands through his ruffled hair.

"I want to go to Aunt Mary's, mamma," he said.

She told him that he was going to-day, but she never thought of holding a little cheerful talk with him, or making him laugh and prattle. All was business with her to-day—dry, restless business. She rang the bell, and, in doing so, perceived the untasted wine on the chimney-piece; and remembering that neither Johnnie nor she had broken their fast, it being now nearly two o'clock, she divided the contents of the glass with him.

Cook and housemaid, as before, replied to her summons, protecting one another up stairs; they brought her some breakfast, and, having laid it on the table, seemed inclined to linger. She did not discourage them; on the contrary, she bade the cook take a seat near the door, and requested the maid to dress the child.

Cook. "Ma'am, we would not wish to trouble you, in this time of afflictions 'specially—I hope the tea is as you like it, ma'am; I took the liberty of making it in my own teapot, ma'am."

Eleanor. "It is very good, thank you. You were about to tell me something."

Cook. "We wouldn't wish to trouble you, ma'am, 'specially not in this time of misfortune, but as I s'pose, ma'am, you and your dear little child will be going away this evening, and you know, ma'am, bless your good heart! poor servants must live."

"You want your wages," said Eleanor, impatiently. "I will settle with you whatever is due."

"Thank you, ma'am," cried cook and housemaid, echoing one another, and arising that they might bob a courtesy.

"You know, ma'am," continued the cook, now standing respectfully, "it ain't the wages alone that was troubling us neither; but, law! 'tis a hawful injury to us servants to have bin residing in the house during such a hawful—hem—a hawful haccident as has happened to that unfortunate gentleman."

"I can not help it," said Eleanor, sternly.

The cook was a little thrown aback; her froglike chin panted a little, and up went the apron to her eyes. Who shall say that apron had not a strong and emotional savor of onions? but it was a fact that cook was in tears.

"Do you want characters?" said Eleanor, softened, yet impatient still. "I am neither well nor strong, but I shall do my best for you, if you would not delay me."

"It ain't exactly characters, ma'am," sobbed the cook; and now the maid began to show unmistakable symptoms of setting up her pipes.

"If you are sorry for your mistress, I think it is quite natural, and I can feel for you," said Eleanor.

"It ain't altogether that neither, ma'am," said the cook, growing suddenly voluble; "but none of us can see rightly how we can ever recover our characters after this night; and as it was through no fault of our own, ma'am—and you'll pardon me for saying it, ma'am—as it was through Mr. Coleman's means we was putt in this hawful situation, we feel as how some compensation beyond our wages—"

Eleanor's face during the cook's preamble was assuming a look of blank perplexity, and as the cook proceeded was next reddening with displeasure.

"Compensation from my husband! for what?"

"I was very much grieved, Mrs. Coleman," continued cook, "and so was Hannah here, to have witnessed Mr. Coleman a comin' out of that room last night."

"What do you mean?" said Eleanor.

"Why, ma'am, the coroner knowed our meaning pretty well this morning," said the cook, drying her eyes, "and I don't s'pose any one in the house believes the poor old mistress had hand, act, or part in that hawful deed, and if any body does, they didn't oughtn't to."

"You are telling me a falsehood—a mean, cruel falsehood," said Eleanor, indignant. "I don't wish your presence here any more."

"You'll pay us our wages least-ways," said the cook, elevating her snub features and person.

"I'll pay you your wages—leave the room."

Out went both women with a sniff and a mutter; but, just as they reached the head of the stairs, Eleanor, under a wayward impulse, called them back. When they were once more in the room with her, she asked them gently, but earnestly, what they meant.

"All I know is this," she said: "Mrs. Kent, your mistress, has been arrested, and Mr. Coleman has accompanied her to Wells. Is that true?"

"Bless 'ee, ma'am, Mr. Coleman has been arrested too," chorused both women a little triumphantly.

Eleanor leaned back with a sudden faintness, but she overcame it in a moment.

"It has taken me quite by surprise," she said. "Sit down both of you, and I will tell you the simple facts. I see now I was very wrong not to have gone down stairs to the inquest; but I can at any moment remove all traces of suspicion from Mr. Coleman—completely! *utterly!*" she said, with characteristic emphasis. "I can place him, by a few words, as far beyond suspicion as that child," continued she, in an ascending scale; and with a queenly contempt for all skepticism on the subject, she pointed to her child, who was now half dressed, and was striving to brush his hair himself, looking at himself in the glass the while, languidly interested in the operation.

Eleanor then gave a full, direct statement of the occurrences of the night, in which she and her husband played a part, merely reserving the portion which 'y inculpated the old lady—how beside him till they were alarmed sounds up stairs—how she nevted his side till they entered the — what she saw there, and so during all the statement the of her audience might have led in stucco for any interest 'eature to be seen on them. attentive, they sat unsurprised oved by the earnest tale.

l, ma'am, it is not for us to *a word of your* account, and *e it will be* hard to blame

"Blame me!" said Eleanor. "Have you been attending?"

"Yes, ma'am, bless you, we have," said the cook, rising. "We have seen something as well as you, ma'am, and we are sorry as we did, ma'am, very sorry. Of course you are the gentleman's wife, and it's natural you should have your account as would clear him; and we don't gainsay it, ma'am — we only think, ma'am, that some compensation might be due to us."

"If you don't believe me, I have no more to say to you," said Eleanor, in indignant surprise. "I am thankful your gross suspicions will do Mr. Coleman no harm."

"Well, ma'am, we're very sorry for you, and leastways we thank you for your promise to pay us our wages; and Hannah and me are very sorry, too, for what we seen. Good afternoon, ma'am."

Eleanor did not feel inclined to return the salutation of the cook, who left the room with the hard, vulgar dignity of underlings who find themselves of a sudden on a level with their superiors. The maid lingered.

"May happen, ma'am, you might require a servant?" she said, with a courtesy. "I could mind the child for you, and dress a bit of dinner very well."

Eleanor looked at her. Her face was young and soft, and, by contrast with her companion's, looked good-natured. She knew her, from her own observation, to be an industrious, careful girl, and, feeling that she had little time or opportunity to make choice of any arrangement, and that she must rather take what offered, she frankly concluded with the girl upon liberal terms to remain with her for the quarter.

"Do you know whether Michael Bryan is below, Hannah?" said Eleanor, when she had completed this arrangement.

"Yes, ma'am; he is sitting by the kitchen fire."

"Go down and tell him I wish to speak to him in the sitting-room alone; then return here to give Master Johnnie his breakfast, and remain with him."

The girl went down on her errand, and Eleanor hastily finished the child's toilet. Not so was she accustomed to dress him. See her, how she tosses the swathes of yellow hair before the

brush into random arrangement, with a division like a streak of forked lightning. How she used to burnish the rich tresses into bells of gold! how she used to fix the little collar smooth, and trim the fit of his tunic till he was as neat as a dress block-boy in a shop-window! Why, now she turns him out a little Puritan sloven. She had better, indeed, hand him over at once into the care of his new maid, who has just entered the room.

"Mr. Bryan is below, ma'am, awaitin' you."

"Attend to Master Johnnie, Hannah, while I am away," said Eleanor, hastily, for her thoughts had been troubling her just now, and tempting her out of her room. She ran down stairs, and found old Michael standing before the black grate.

"A bad night's work, honey," he said, shaking his oblong bald head funereally at her.

"I do not let my mind rest on it," she said. "I am going to ask you a great favor. Must you return at once?"

"I'm my own masther, dear; I've neither wife nor child to timpt me home or dhrive me from it, and it's a toss up which they do. There's a little charge, no doubt, that has come upon me, and I don't begrudge to undertake it for the sake of her that's gone; but it takes after the father too strong, and I can't stomach it in the same house wid me yet a while; so I'm the same as a bachelor, ye may say. And now, if it's a thing that I could in any way sarve you by advice or time—don't be angry now—or by any little ready money, only say the word."

She held out her hand to him, and Michael took it with a fatherly ease, not to say affectionate condescension.

"I'll only ask your time and advice then, Michael. I've just learned that Mr. Coleman has been arrested under some groundless suspicion: is this true?"

"So you didn't know that? Ah! well, I was thinkin' it would surprise you to tell you. The ould misthress is sent for trial too."

"I say Mr. Coleman is sent for trial," said Eleanor.

"Ay, but the ould misthress—what do you *think of that?*"

"*It is a very sad thing* for her, Michael—a dreadful thing. How Mr. Coleman must feel it!"

"Misther Will has enough to feel for himself, I expect, honey, not but saying we may get him through it some way."

"Get him through it! Oh! but I forgot—you could not know. Before we say another word, I will just tell you exactly the facts, Michael, which I absolutely know; you will then see the—" she wanted a word strong enough and paused—"the absurd, willful stupidity of supposing my husband could possibly be guilty of a crime like this."

Here she told the whole simple truth again, with rather an indignant emphasis and much repetition, concluding, however, with a dignified assurance of tone as she looked into Michael's face for sympathy—a face which maintained but a stolid benevolence throughout.

"It's not a bad account of it, sure enough, honey, and if we lay our heads together I dare say we might mend it here and there so as to make it hang together more nate and pat; I'm willing to swear to any part of it, or the whole of it, if only we could be sartin of no contradiction. Whisht now a moment! never talk secrets wid a closed door."

He went lightly across the room, and opened the door wide, so as to command a view of the hall from end to end.

"What is all this for?" said Eleanor, regarding him with impatient amazement.

Michael came back to his place at the chimney-piece, and fixed his eyes upon her again.

"'Twon't do to say to the coort that you and Misther Will wor sittin' down here together at the time of that blow and them groans. Betther say ye both had just gone up to your beds—I've my raisons for it."

"But it was the fact," she said, sharply, "that Mr. Coleman and I were sitting here."

He looked at her athwart his long pompous nose, and wagged his head at her reproachfully.

"'Twon't do, honey—'twon't do; there's no one within hearin', and if I'm to help you there must be no secrets betune you and me. Don't, now, don't, now; I don't blame you, honey. Ay, and there's another little statement I'd curtail a bit—you don't know how

sharp they are, them counsel, when they come to cut up a story—we daren't say you and Misther Will entered the room together; that's a taste too much for him, seeing that all the d— lot o' cooks and scullions saw you just arrived at the door, which was locked in your face, and you cryin' fit to burst."

"You don't know how you are paining and insulting me," she cried. "I shall tell nothing but the truth, and I can swear to every word I've told you in the presence of God. My evidence is full and direct, and of course I shall be believed. I have never done any thing in all my life which could throw discredit on my sworn testimony of what I saw and heard."

"Well, well, well, I can make no good o' you, I'm afeard," said Michael. "Have you told your story to any body except me?"

"I have, of course, to the women-servants."

"Stick to every word of it, thin, if you were to be torn asunder. I was wrong. Maybe if I'd have been consulted a little sooner I might have been of sarvice in consartin' it betther."

"If you use such language to me," said Eleanor, deeply offended, "I shall not accept any assistance from you. If you ever again show the slightest doubt of what I have told you, I can not forgive it."

"I say stick to it," exclaimed Michael; "that's the very way to look and speak. Practice that very look, and stick to every word. Ay," he continued, in a changed and reflective tone, "and so you tould it to the women? And so they were onaisy in their minds about their wages, honey? That won't do at all; we must pay 'em up."

"I have promised to pay them," said Eleanor.

"Well, now, you're a deal sharper than I thought—that's the way. Now," said he, in a mysterious voice, "I don't say it would be safe to offer them a thrifle more, say a five pound note, because if it was a thing that they refused it, it might sound very ugly in coort; but maybe we might putt it in their heads to ax for a little compensation on account of the blast to their charackters in being mixed up in this business. Do ye understand what I'd be at?" He looked at her portentously, and winked.

"They asked me for compensation," said Eleanor, "and I distinctly refused. This is not my husband's house, they are not his servants, this crime does not touch him, and they have taken no harm from either him or me. I certainly think we do more than we need when we pay up all their wages to the ensuing quarter."

"So they axed for compensation, did they," said Michael, "and ye grudged a ten-pound note? Faith, if it comes out of my own pocket, they must have it."

"Michael," she said, suddenly starting from the subject with an impulse, "tell me this truly and simply: What was Mr. Coleman's account of last night? no matter why I ask, but tell me exactly."

"Well, I wouldn't tell you a lie, my dear, but Misther Will's story was exactly the same as yours, neither more nor less."

"Thank God," said Eleanor; "then all is simple. Supposing I were inventing an account and not telling the plain truth," she continued, confronting Michael somewhat sternly, "why did you counsel me — you whom I thought a friend — to contradict my husband's honest testimony?"

"I will tell you why, dear—because I saw it tried on, and it twouldn't go down. Misther Will talked like a lawyer, and made it all out beautiful, but he broke down on them two points. It didn't seem likely, you see, that if you ran in with the masther you should be found battering at the door as if you'd just run out of your bedroom, and it seemed a queer thing that ye two should be sitting up in this room to one o'clock waiting for Mr. Kent, who, it appeared, was on unfriendly terms wid Misther Will; and if you was sitting up for him, it wasn't like to be wid frindly intint. If you tould them that, they'd knock you off your perch in a jiffey."

"No matter, that's all I was anxious for. Now my true and conscientious statement will support his—nothing can alarm me now," she said, in grateful triumph.

"Well, sure, that's a good job," said Michael, with mild toleration, "that's a good job. And now that you and I are rubbin' shouldhers together—touching this compensation, honey, you don't for-

get, I hope that them two women will be witnesses on the trial?"

"Well?" asked Eleanor.

"Oh, well—oh, well—you're mighty fond of plain speakin'," said Michael, snappishly. "Now you see clearly that I want to stand your friend throughout, and it's for your good I'm contriving and arguing. That man has got his deserts, and if I was put to my oath I can't but say I feel pretty contint this morning, and I don't feel toward the assassin of that man as I would toward an ordinary assassin. It's a sentiment that might surprise certain parties in Wells, who have sat on juries wid me times and times again, but I had an ould sore that wouldn't rightly heal while that man lived, who put me out of my place (not that I didn't do a dale better out of it than in it), and, worst of all, the villain who destroyed my poor daughter. You take my word for it, I wish you and Misther Will luck, and will stand by you through thick and thin, as if I'd nothing else to do. Pay them women five pound apiece to make 'em stutter a bit in coort — maybe you'll stop their tongues altogether."

"I will not wrong my cause," said Eleanor, hotly, "by such an act. What they can say is nothing; what I can say confirms my husband word for word, and proves his account before the world."

"What do you want my advice on?" said Michael, shortly.

"I'm going to Wells this evening," said Eleanor.

"Ah ha! Are you determined?"

"Quite."

"Then I advise you by all means to go. And what are you goin' to do wid the child?"

"I am going to send him off with Hannah to his aunt's in Kent."

"Wid Hannah? Oh! Are you bent on it?"

"Quite."

"Then I advise you by all means to send him."

"Thank you, Michael. Is this your sincere advice? You seem to say it to please me."

"How cute you're grown! Well, honey, if you'd be led by me, you'd just do as Misther Will bid you, and wait wid your friends, you and the child, till ye hear from him. I'll see you safe myself, for I can't but think you'd find yourself in Misther Will's way at this present."

"In the way!" repeated Eleanor, hotly. "You know nothing of me or Mr. Coleman when you say so. Will you be so kind, Michael, as to accompany me to Wells? I shall take lodgings near the prison for the short time Mr. Coleman will be confined."

"Wid all my heart. I'll accompany you, honey, if it was to the tiptop of the Andes and down again, and you may tell 'em all Michael advised you to go, because he couldn't stop you. So you are goin' to send off the child wid Hannah?"

"*At once*," she said.

He looked at her hard, and bethought him how she used to keep that child in lavender: an open lobby window was like typhus in the house; a painted sugar-stick or paper of striped brandy-balls, such as Michael used to buy him in London, was surreptitiously (not to offend Michael) taken from the child and made away as poison. What a change must have been worked in this poor mother within a few hours! It interested him, and he speculated on it for a while, watching her narrowly.

"Now how do you know, dear, but that child will be bolting his vittals in wads as big as walnuts when he gets from under the mammy's eye?"

"Oh, folly! the child will do well enough. My sister will be as careful as I could be."

"And how do you know, now," continued Michael, "but Hannah will be houldin' that child's throath open to all the east winds under heaven, and liftin' him down out of the chaise right into a puddle, and leavin' his socks to dhry themselves on him, instead of rowlin' him in a blanket, a roostin' on a warming-pan?"

"Nonsense! she will take care of him; and at such a time we must all venture something."

"Maybe he'll be let climb the spiked areas, my dear, or he'll be playing hop-scotch with measly childer."

"Oh, don't trouble me with such folly! this is no time for it, Michael. We must have a covered chaise from the town. Might I ask you to send it up as soon as possible? You and I will have the gig here. You know a plac

in Wells, don't you, where we can put it up for to-night? And you can easily find lodgings for me; I am not particular, if it be only near the jail."

Thus she laid out the whole campaign herself with a decision and energy which, though not less efficient, were seldom so demonstrative in prosperous times. But through life they always rose to the trouble and kept its level. Having dismissed her friend Michael, she returned to her bedroom, looked vacantly at the child, and gave a few directions to the girl as to the selection from his little wardrobe—what to take and what to leave behind. She wrote a hasty letter to her sister, shortly stating the necessity for putting such trouble upon her, and begging of her to take charge of Johnnie for a month, when all this painful business would be well over, and she would come for the child herself. Having folded it and put it in an envelope, she gave it to the maid with the necessary money for the journey, together with what wages were due; and when all was ready, "Johnnie, love," she said, "you are going to aunt for a while; you will be a good boy, and I will write to you, and your papa will soon come for you to fetch you home. You must say a little prayer for him every night."

With another affectionate kiss she handed him over to the maid, and turned eagerly to other thoughts. Yet the child was looking heavy, and showed that listlessness which frightens the mother who studies the moods of her children, and seems to indicate something ailing.

To her packing she went with a will, and her eyes grew bright and her cheek grew flushed, and there was a lovely indescribable tenderness of anxiety about brow and mouth as she selected her husband's things, whatever might be chiefly useful or chiefly divert his mind. In the first place, clothes, linen, desk, and dressing-case; then the books he loved best and was most wont to have her read to him. Over her work she unwittingly murmured to herself words of a reassuring tendency, words forbidding fear or doubt that she might keep the heart up. It is a capital plan: *words outspoken give* seal and stamp *to the vague logic of* the mind within *that is striving for* courage—it stereotypes the comfort. The mute argument of thought is but a leaky craft, which will not swim high and taut; but brave words outspoken calk the seams and keep the cold water of despond from dribbling in. It was really marvelous to see a woman after such an awful night, and with such awful company in the house at the moment, hold her nerves so steady and her faculties so collected. But all the terror of her situation was powerfully absorbed by another emotion, which was so heart-filling it put out personal fears. The devotion to her husband, redoubling in his need, linked to it every nerve and impulse, till its zeal almost resembled some suppressed joy.

Yet sometimes her light eye watered, and that was not like joy. Be sure she was then suffering by an electric sympathy her husband's pain for his mother—a pain which her lifelong eloquence and cunning comfort must make head against, yet perhaps never overcome. She was burning to quit the house and be on the road; and that she might at once sever the ties which seemed holding her to the house, she went to the head of the kitchen stairs, and, calling the cook, paid her all the claims of the servants with a liberal hand, but in cold silence—not a word of kindliness or farewell toward a woman who presumed an insinuation against her husband.

Long before Michael had the vehicle to the door, she was standing in the hall with her luggage on the step, impatiently waiting. At length she was seated beside him in the open gig, and speeding along the road to Wells. Michael was telling her some story of the difficulty he had in getting out the horse, which he harnessed himself, the groom insisting that till the trial the beast was the queen's property, and maybe after; but she lost the clew of his long-winded narrative. She was fretting at the thought of the endless road, and the endless night that divided her from her husband—what a night he must spend, and she within a stone's throw of him, yet unable to signify to him her vicinity by word or look!

The lawn, as they left it, was streaming with yellow sunshine, the hills were sainted with sunshine and repose. What an evening is this for post-haste grief! Eleanor looked behind her at the house.

Why, it seemed as if some company were holding festival within, for in every window were an hundred goblin lustres; eaves and lattice were turning to witch gold. As Michael drove her rapidly away, and the road began to stretch between, she looked back now and then, yielding to a sort of growing fascination which came upon her fitfully. While she was within the house she had walked its rooms, all save one, with an indifferent tread, unwitting of the horror that hung about. Her first look back was certainly one of repulsion; but now, as it receded and receded, growing gray in distance and in twilight, its horror grew upon her. It had a history by which it will be remembered forever, till no stone remains upon another. It was like a charnel-house. She felt it was not within her power ever to approach it or enter its door again.

"Michael," she said, abruptly, at a moment when in fancy she was seated beside her husband in his cell, casting about for some soothing resource, and with womanly unreason supporting the gentlest and most innocent course of womanly misrepresentation, "Michael, upon what grounds did they arrest Mrs. Kent?"

"Ay, now you're coming at it; that's about the fust question you ought to have asked me. How she came by it I'll not venture to say; but — saving your presence, honey — there was a squirt of blood found across her dress, and when she was axed to explain it, she contradicted her fust story, which she told sturdy enough, God help her! and made a sort of confession that she was in the room beside Kent at the time; so Misther Will explained the discrepancy next day to the coroner by saying that his mother was so agitated she didn't know what she said; that it had been her custom, being wake in herself, to come down and sit wid you and him, as all the sarvants could testify, but that on this particular night she seemed too ill to lave her room, and after the murder had been committed he had found her all of a hape up stairs, too bothered to tell what she had seen. The story is likely enough as far as the ould lady is concerned, but her spite to Kent, and the spirt of blood, and all that, give a look of what we call connivance, you see."

Eleanor received the intelligence without a word, concealing its effect upon her for a long half hour; then having, I suppose, concocted the calmest, most temperate comment that could be made under the circumstances, she said,

"Now, Michael, I want to know from you, who have heard my solemn, truthful statement of what Mr. Coleman and I heard and saw last night, what is your conviction."

"I'm not going for to tell that," replied old Michael, employing himself upon whipping up the horse, and drawing him together with the reins. "If you want to have my conviction on that, wait till ye hear me talking in my sleep."

"'Tis no matter," said Eleanor, offended again, "'tis no matter; I had thought you were a friend of Mr. Coleman's and mine."

"So I am, honey, and I'll say any thing you plase. Sure's he's not guilty no more than myself. It was a big black man in kersey that came in at the windey or down the chimbley and done it— there, now; and I wouldn't say but he was right to do it too, for I'd almost as lief have done it myself, because Kent was a scheming, false, unmanly ruffian, whom it was a marcy to have put out of harm's way. Begor, the sergeant took it into his head last night it was I done it, and there's a dale more evidence against me, if they looked into it, than against poor Misther Will."

"By God's providence," she murmured to herself, "I was by him through it all."

"Well, and I don't see why we shouldn't clap the handcuffs on yourself, honey; but all will go right; we'll catch that big fellow in kersey yet, and hould him up to execration. Here we are in Wells, my dear, and I'll dhrive you right up to furnished lodgings as if you had bespoken them; there's not a corner in the town but I know by heart."

"I must lodge quite near the jail," she said. "Tell me when we are passing it. Michael, what building is that?"

But Michael was sitting with averted head that moment, and did not reply; they were passing the hospital in which he had left the poor anointed remains a few mornings before.

"Childless, honey — childless!" he said, looking grimly before him into the bleak distance. "I dont know wher

they've buried her if I wanted to cry over her, but I must put up with it. I'll trate you like a daughter, as I never trated her, honey," he continued, turning to her and scrutinizing her face compassionately. "Sich a face, like a two-year old cherub, as you have. Now I would say them eyes of yours weren't six years old — they're so holy, God bless them! And here we are, illigant rooms, and an honest, quiet landlady, who doesn't want to pry on us if we came to her wid a whisky still in the box."

Michael pulled up before a comfortable row of two-storied houses, and, stepping down, he employed a street-boy to hold the horse's head while he knocked at a certain salmon-colored hall door. On either side were bills in the windows advertising furnished lodgings, and all looked quiet, respectable, and moderate from without. Michael knocked, and the door was opened by the landlady herself, whom he addressed as an acquaintance, and as one in whom he had implicit dependence.

"Take this lady up, Mrs. Porter; she's a friend of mine and a lady of degree, but you mustn't charge her more for that. Ask her no questions, and take dainty care of her, as if she was one of your choice geraniums, for she's one we all set great store on. And now, honey," said he, turning to Eleanor and shaking hands with her, "go up with Mrs. Porter at once, and make a good hearty meal, for you've eaten nothing since morning, and then take a fine wholesome night's rest; I'll go find a shake-down for myself and the horse, and I'll come and see you in the morning, for if you sink we'll all sink—Masther Will, the ould lady, and myself."

Eleanor was shown in and led up stairs. Two rooms second floor were shown to her as ready for her occupation, and she was at once satisfied.

The landlady was a tall, ladylike-looking woman, whose whole face seemed running into double chin; the traces of pretty features were yet left in a small straight nose, and little chubby mouth, and a very fine pair of black eyes. She was very handsomely dressed, and was an able landlady, taking no modesty to herself in commending the lodgings, and feeling a power and sense of influence over Eleanor by reason of her superior height, and age, and chin. She settled for Eleanor the rooms which would suit her, the rent which she could afford to pay—nor was it unreasonable; and she took off her lodger's bonnet, and gave her immediate possession.

"You can have your tea, ma'am, whenever you please; the kettle is just boiling for my own, and I'll lift in some of my geraniums to make the room look cheerful, if you'll be so good as to sit down."

Eleanor thanked her, and by this time, feeling both faint and hungry, was fain to ask her for something more substantial than tea. She should have a chop and some fresh cresses at once, decided Mrs. Porter. Poor dear! she looked tired after the journey. Any friend of Mr. Bryan's would be very welcome to Mrs. Porter, but her sweet kind face was quite enough without recommendation.

"You'll find this a very quiet street, ma'am; it's one of the quietest streets in Wells."

"Are we near any public building?" said Eleanor.

"What, public? why there's the cathedral down the road, and the old town gate beyond it—a great curiosity."

"But how far are we from the cheese market?" said Eleanor, asking a question of more significance than every reader may suspect.

"What! the cheese market? Bless you, we are a'most a mile. Now maybe your husband does a trade in that line, ma'am?"

"No; I have a reason for wishing to be near that part of the town," said Eleanor.

"Why, my dear, bless your heart! you'll be very glad, should you stay long in this town, that you're so far from it, for the assizes are just coming on, and the court-house and cheese market are all one. Why, the place will be a perfect riot in assize time, and the rents will run up. Now you have as pretty a walk down to the market as you'll find in any town in Somersetshire."

"I wish to be near the court-house; I told Michael I wished to lodge near it," murmured Eleanor, with restrained fretfulness.

"Speaking of the court-house, ma'am,

there's a queer piece of news flying about," said the landlady, intercepting her lodger's discontent by some amusing gossip: "'tis said there has been a dreadful murder committed at a place called Hill Side, and by a London gentleman—I didn't rightly hear the name—who took a kitchen hatchet, they say, and—"

"Do you know where Michael will put up the horse?" said Eleanor, in confusion; "I don't think I gave him money to pay for it." She fussed out her purse.

"Bless you, Mr. Bryan is a rich man," said the landlady; "he never leaves home without a ten-pound note in his pocket; don't you fear for the horse, ma'am. But about this murder—it's strange Mr. Bryan did not tell you of it, for I believe he once knew the family, and—"

"Mrs. Porter," said Eleanor, "here is a check for rather a large sum; I suppose I could not have it cashed this evening?"

"No, ma'am, you must wait till the bank is opened to-morrow. But—"

"Could you just kindly give the order for my tea, Mrs. Porter; I have not broken my fast since morning."

Mrs. Porter left the room immediately, and, having given the necessary directions below for the chop, she made tea, toasted bread, and put a bunch of fresh cresses on a plate, and when all was ready carried up the tray of refreshments to poor Eleanor, who met the cordial landlady with a troubled eye.

She is nervous, thought worthy Mrs. Porter. Poor thing, I must not tell her horrible stories.

But, to her surprise, her lodger revived the ungenial subject herself with an unsteady voice, and invited a detail. The good-natured woman, with a demonstrative tact, now began to parry Eleanor's curiosity, and strove to put her off with soothing, playful assurances that there was no murder at all—it was some idle rumor. She addressed her, in fact, just as she might divert a frightened child from its alarm, but Eleanor cut her short.

"It is not a rumor, Mrs. Porter; I am Mrs. Coleman, and I have followed my husband, who is arrested by mistake, *in order that I might be at hand to give evidence which will clear him.*"

Mrs. Porter had been marshaling the cups, plates, and knives upon the table, and had just lifted the teapot to pour out a cup of tea for the stranger when this announcement was made. She now feebly clattered the spout forward into the cup, and, lifting her head in consternation, fixed her large black eyes upon her guest.

"Law bless us! *you*, ma'am?"

"If you think your house will be in any way injured by my presence in it, it is not too late to find another lodging."

"Law save us!" exclaimed Mrs. Porter again, "I was only startled, ma'am—it ain't that, ma'am. But, law! you told me so suddenly; and, dear me! so the gentleman's innocent? See, see, how these reports travel. I thought Mr. Bryan looked close to-night, but, bless you, I'd never have inquired. I hope I shall see you out of your trouble, ma'am; and—hem!—you're very welcome to remain, if you please, ma'am."

Yet, as this woman betook herself to her own chamber below, all that fussy genial demeanor had gone; she was no longer inclined for sociality.

Eleanor above stairs, though she had been troubled with her landlady's society, felt the sudden change, and it made her long all the more yearningly to be with him, by him, her arms twined about him with whom her lot had fallen for life or death, for honor or shame.

She ate and drank abstractedly. When the awed landlady returned with the chop, she gazed at Eleanor again with that peculiar look with which we have seen worthy cockney ladies regard the cage of a feeding tigress or a yelling hyena—a look all wonder and feeble awe. It was a prodigy to see a woman of such limb and weight so upset by a poor timid lady, who in age might be her daughter. While she was absent, Mrs. Porter had been endeavoring to regard the matter in a dry, business-like point of view. She had been looking out for lodgers all the week, and what was this she had caught at last? What was she to do with this fugitive stranger if not exhibit her? Why, if it got abroad by-and-by, when this business begins to interest people, that she lodged the murderer's wife, her house might become a sort of show room, and the whole door be encircl

with the mob and the police. She decided, however, that at present, by keeping her own counsel and holding Eleanor at safe distance, nobody would know her from an ordinary woman, at least if there were no stains of blood upon her. Dear bless us! what if there were? Mr. Bryan has played her a pretty trick. Meantime, however, there was the handsome weekly rent, which, in common prudence, must be secured in advance. Before she left the room she faltered, and said, not disrespectfully,

"You are very welcome to remain here, ma'am, I'm sure; but, considering the peculiar circumstances, ma'am, of your coming, would you excuse me asking you for my rent each week in advance?"

"I have no objection," said Eleanor, coldly; I can not pay you to-night, having only a check about me."

Mrs. Porter courtesied and left the room. Was she not right in her caution? How could she know what part her tenant had taken in the murder herself? Mrs. Porter will lock her bedroom door to-night, I warrant you, and skip into bed, and lie awake listening to the poor human mouse up stairs as it moves restlessly about. Mrs. Porter never thought again of bringing the geraniums, of which she was a fancier, into her suspicious lodger's room; perhaps she might find all her pale pelargoniums turned into blood-scarlet blossoms in the morning.

Eleanor would certainly have left the house that night to find another shelter but for a morbid apprehension that the whole town would refuse to take her in. There was a helpless phase of mind she had experienced once, and she fell into the very mood again as she contemplated a lonely search for lodgings. Two years ago she was on a visit with her brother-in-law, who kept a large school in Kent; Johnnie was then five years old, and he was discovered one morning to be in the first stage of scarlatina. It was like a spark on a hayrick; it was absolutely necessary to get him out of the crowded house; so she went wandering about from lodging to lodging, seeking for some shelter wherein to nurse her child, and still, *when they heard what* was the nature *of the disease, each timid* householder *forbade her his threshold.* She remembered the feeling well, and the look of the bleak evening streets, and the dull red cloud-streak over the houses as she went knocking from door to door, shunned and rebuffed wherever she went.

"So might I wander to-night," thought Eleanor; "this woman is no exception; they'll all look on me with misgiving; so I'll lock up my thoughts and feelings till I come to see my darling, and soon we'll rise from this trouble, snow white, *both* of us." She did not go to bed that night, for a great might of sleep fell on her in her chair; she slept till the fire was black, and she slept till the daylight came in. Then she woke, icy cold and comfortless, ignorant where on earth she had dropped. The room was strange to her; its kangaroo chair, and its tawny slit of blind seen through the half-closed shutters, and its table-cloth bedight with green peacocks. Then, as on the former morning, came the shock of truth on her shelterless heart — the tragedy of the night before, the terrible scene in which her husband actually wrestled with her conscience, and strove to pledge her to perjury. It seemed as if this dreadful fact had not rested on her mind till now, there had been such a swelling tide of feeling; her love, moon-like, swelled that tide. But now, in the bitter cold morning, just started from a blank sleep, the tide had sunk, and lo! a ribbed black wreck of home.

She went shivering into the bedroom, and crept in miserably between the clothes till the hour was come when she might meet her husband again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When she woke the sky was such a beautiful blue that wind and rain seemed never to have held their foul muster there; and as the sunshine slipped into Eleanor's room like a freshet of light from heaven, that naked ghastliness began to leave her situation, and hope and confidence slipped again into her heart.

At eight o'clock Michael knocked by arrangement at the door. She was up and dressed to receive him, and she made so much of his arrival, fussing so to have him seated with her in her room, that old Michael supposed some second contingency of import had tak-

en place during the night, and that she was about to confide it to him. But it was a mere passing exuberance of relief from the revolt to her nature, and from an insulting false position which her imagination had exaggerated.

"You must breakfast with me, Michael," she said, "and then you must come with me to the jail and see me admitted. I am so impatient to be there."

"Nat'ral enough; but there's no need of hurry, for the door won't open to you till ten, and we must get the order from the governor fust."

"And, Michael, since I am going to lodge here, and *that woman* Mrs. Porter may possibly think Mr. Coleman guilty, I want to beg of you to set her right."

"*That woman!*" repeated Michael. "I hope Mrs. Porter hasn't been uncivil to you?"

"No, no, quite civil enough; only set us right."

"I'll set you both right enough, don't you fear, honey; and now I'll just go down and send up your breakfast comfortable."

"You must breakfast with me," she said; "I don't think *you* object."

"Faith, I was only overpowered by the honor, honey. Ay, I'll crack an egg wid you, and have a rasher of bacon wid a lady of the land for once in my life; there are other farm bailiffs have done so."

He went down stairs forthwith, and helped to bring up the breakfast, which was very cleanly served, and good of its kind. Under Michael's encouragement and persecution Eleanor made a good meal, and doubtless so did honest Michael, who, watching his opportunity, when her mournful bright eyes were off him, contrived to pour a half gill of rum into each cup of tea. Michael began painting his nose at most unseasonable hours, and Eleanor, much oppressed with the aroma, yet was too much absorbed by her thoughts to observe the cause.

"We must go to the governor first?" said Eleanor, inquiringly.

"Ay, he'll give you an order for admission."

"He has full power, I suppose, in the jail?"

"*As much power as I have over my farm-yard, honey, and widout ye get an order from him, ye'd be prosecuted for trespass if ye set fut inside.*"

She was satisfied, and the meal being over, she got together portmanteau and parcels, while Michael went forth to bring the gig — that antique country machine so severely criticised in these modern streets—round to the door.

Eleanor carried down the small portmanteau herself containing every thing she thought needful to her husband's comfort, and, opening the hall door to Michael's knock, had it placed with the other things in the well of the vehicle. Michael then helped her up to her seat, and, mounting beside her, they started for the jail along the pleasant outskirting city road. Eleanor sat thus in the sunshine with a sort of queer, subdued fanatic smile on her face, of which old Michael could make nothing, though he watched it askance now and then.

"She's going to see him, maybe that's it," he thought.

A queenly subdued smile, wavering indeed at moments, but returning again; as when the wind blows a chain of gas jets into paleness, and then they shine out again, so that smile faded and returned in her eyes.

"I'm glad to see you look so gay, my darlint."

"I am going to see the governor myself," she said, "and to demand Mr. Coleman's immediate discharge from prison."

"The divil you are, my dear! Well, I'm not shy in axing a favor myself."

"I am asking a right—mere justice," she said, decisively.

"Ha! You might as well ask for a jubilee day for the other prisoners when you're about it, for fear they'd be jealous."

"Drive quicker, Michael, if you please," was her only reply.

They drove on in silence, and passed the cathedral, a mighty pile of sun and shadow, with little silver crescents of light upon the sculptured kings clustered on its front, and they passed the old arch of the city gate, ornate as a casket, and trembling atop with burnished ivy, and then they sped by graceful brannew terraces, with veranda windows, and sheets of clematis, nasturtiums, and geraniums beneath and about.

"Why are you silent, Michael?"

said, turning on him waywardly. "Do you see any reason why I should not demand my husband's release?"

"I wonst had a little maol* cow—"

"Michael, what do you mean? Did you hear my question?"

"I wonst had a little maol cow, and she never would go straight home, but gave up her whole mind to dartin' down every lane and corner. It twasn't for divilment, I know for sartin by the anxious way she kept lowin'; but she was sthrivin' to find a short cut, I suppose, or more like a lookin' for her lost calf. She had some raisonable notion in her head, I'll swear, but her acts had no raison in them. One day I made it my convanience to go out larkin' wid her, and let her just have her own way, if she were to lep into a quarry or scamper into the public pound. She plased herself, and I followed her quite hearty the betther part of a day down every boreen, and around every old wall, and through every green gutter, till she was fairly tired out and gave up all hope, and let me lead her back to her field widout a prank or a start. Now you're the very moral of that little maol cow."

"For pity's sake! what are you talking of at such a time?"

"You can do no harm by any queer thing ye do; I'll not balk your whim in any thing, and, what's more, I'll abet you in whatever you take in your head."

She resented this foolery, and retired upon her dignity.

"Set me down at the governor's house, if you please; I see my course distinctly, and I think such jests very ill-timed and cruel."

"You take me too literal, honey," said he, observing that amid that confident smile he had been watching she was not far from an opposite extreme—bursting into tears. "You take me too literal; I was only tryin' to put a pleasant face upon it, just like this bright morning. Of coorse, go up to the governor, and tell your wrongs to him."

"And Mr. Coleman's wrongs," she said.

"And Misther Will's wrongs—why not? Tell him you want to see your husband, and that you've brought his *shavin' tools for him*; and, begor, you may tell the governor to surrendher, for ould Michael Bryan is outside. Whisht, now, 'twill all go right; we know very well it is a crabbed twist, but we'll open it with the help of God."

With this sort of cajoling comfort they reached the long dead wall which could belong to no other building than a jail, and when they had arrived at the gate Eleanor got down, hastily took the small portmanteau in her hand, refusing all assistance, and bidding Michael not wait. She knocked at the small side door. A turnkey opened it, and she told him directly who she was, and demanded to see the governor immediately. She was at once passed in, and old Michael, gathering up the reins, moved his head fitfully up and down with a loud, compassionate clicking of his tongue.

"Let her follow out her coorse, poor darlint, and small blame to her. There's the Scotch girl in the story, now, that wouldn't tell a bit of a fib to save her own sister's life, and I'll go bail she'd haggle and bounce like a fishwoman to put a penny upon her cheeses; whereas here's this poor young sweetheart of a wife ready to lie and swear to the whole bench of magistrates, and to all the judges in the land, that she may save her husband. Bedad, I admire the last a dale more than the fust, any day."

With this soliloquy, which, if it did not testify to any exalted moral code, at least evinced a lively unschooled sympathy for the cause he had espoused, he turned the horse's head away and jogged him back toward the stable, smoking the while a meditative pipe, which he took from the ample pocket of his swallow-tailed coat.

CHAPTER XIX.

Eleanor found the governor within. He met her without reserve, as one accustomed to prisoners and their relations, yet respectfully and with a certain measure of commiseration.

"We received Mr. Coleman and his mother last night," he said, "and we have made them as comfortable as our regulations will permit. I suppose you want an order to visit your husband, and I shall be very happy to give it you. But I must acquaint you, madam,

*Hornless; literally bald.

that an officer of the jail is always present at any interview between a prisoner and his family."

"That is not entirely what I came to you about," she said, gazing at him with mild-eyed confidence. "I was so unfortunate, sir, by some mistake, as not to have been present at the inquest as a witness, and my husband's account of himself required support. I happen to be able to corroborate him," she said, smothering all show of zeal by a sort of instinct that in such plain business truth it would be injurious. "He is as innocent as myself of the whole transaction, sir; I shall give you my evidence on it on oath this moment, and I must then beg of you to give me an order for his immediate discharge."

The governor was a highly respectable, bald-headed man, who had never been insulted in all his life. He regarded the lady with solemn wonder.

"My dear madam," he began; but she interrupted him.

"Sir, I was seated by my husband's side from eight o'clock till a quarter to two in the sitting-room; we both of us heard the fatal blow given up stairs and the groans that followed. We both of us ran up stairs to the door, I holding my husband firmly by the arm. We both rushed into Mrs. Kent's room, and saw Mr. Kent lying murdered on the bed. My husband then put me out and locked the door."

"My dear madam, I really can not allow you—"

"Hear me to the end; I have just done, and it is the simple truth. He then put me out and locked the door, and the servants found me crying outside in alarm. This is my direct evidence, and agrees with my husband's statement word for word, though I did not hear him make that statement, and was only told it after I had given my account to a friend. On the strength, then, of this explanatory evidence, I ask you to give him his freedom, and let him return home with me."

"My dear lady," said the governor, with upraised bushy brows, "you can not be in earnest. I have no such power. You mistake my functions altogether. I really feel for you very much, and so far as giving you access to your husband, subject to our regulations, I *shall be very happy;* but really you ought to know, and it is not my province to tell you, that your husband is under very grave suspicion, and must take his trial."

"Oh, sir, it must not come to that," she cried, beginning to entreat, and her zeal overcoming her discretion. "If the coroner had but heard my evidence, my husband could not have been even arrested. He bears the highest character from all the most important business men of London," she cried, in magnificent hyperbole, and she believed it while she spoke. "I have got a testimonial here with me." She thrust a nervous hand into her pocket.

"You are really giving yourself useless trouble, and, pardon me, for a lady of your seeming intelligence, making a very strange mistake. Yes—yes—yes," said he, as she held the testimonial under his blank regards, "very flattering: it may be of great consequence to him on his trial, but there's no use in showing it to me."

"But I have often and often heard," said she, persistently, "that a prisoner taken up on suspicion is immediately discharged when a witness appears who can fully exculpate him. Pray, dear sir, take the steps at once; communicate with the coroner or the magistrates. I meant to bring him the good news this morning. This is such a shock to me. It would have made us so happy," she said, looking in his face with a piteous smile.

"I really do not grudge you the time, dear madam, though just now I am hurried, but you are asking an impossibility, and you will not take my answer. Now do, like a good lady, discuss it over with your husband's attorney, or any professional man of your acquaintance; now *do*, there's a good lady, and I will give you an order immediately to visit your husband."

He went to his desk, and Eleanor set her eyes upon a gay print on the wall, very vacantly and with a long indrawn breath, which critically saved her from a burst of tears; she just turned the corner of that outburst of disappointment safely, and it all subsided.

She took the order with inarticulate thanks, and made her way down stairs under the guidance of a turnkey, who showed her across the yard, and through an iron door, and down a few step

through a long dull passage, till he paused before the door of a cell and put the key into the lock.

"Wait — wait one moment," she whispered. She drew another long breath, had another struggling heave of the bosom, and again she conquered that burst of tears.

"Now open," she whispered.

The man turned the key and drew the bolt, swinging open the door, and she stood within. Her husband was sitting on the bench beside his bed. A dash of sunshine all scored with prison bars was stretched across the bed and up the wall.

"My own darling Will!" she murmured. Starting up from his seat at the word, he caught her in his arms, and then the liberated sobs broke forth. It seemed as if she had treasured this burst of mingled joy and sorrow for his bosom.

The turnkey witnessed it all with indifferent eyes. He had followed in and taken his seat in the shadow respectfully enough. He also had a wife, this turnkey, but it was not her custom to cry upon his breast.

Then Eleanor wiped away her tears and sat gravely by him a while, enjoying the feeling of his company. Presently she rose and smiled at him timidly —a sort of explorative smile, as a doctor might feel a pulse—and Coleman's heart grew somewhat lighter to see it.

She took a cheerful tone and a cheerful view of every thing this morning, as she moved about the little gray room, making it look more comfortable by many an artistic touch, and strictly avoiding any thing like a scene, any thing even approaching it in either word or act. She made playful allusions to former times in exterior features not unlike the present; for instance—

"It seems to me, Will," she said, "Lady Penhurst was not so very impatient for me this time as she used to be; I am afraid I have fallen in her ladyship's regards."

As she was arranging the bleak premises, and, having opened his dressing-case, was trimming up the shelf with the bright round looking-glass, the shining boxes of tooth-powder and shaving-paste, the satin-wood brushes, etc., she affected to discover many points of superiority in his present chamber to that prison room in noisy Fleet Street, as she smiled through the recent traces of tears.

"Why, Will, here is a full-grown poker! Do you remember the Twelvepenny Nail in London? And here is a permanent arm-chair, not like that old Ticket of Leave which used to disappear so mysteriously."

Allusions again to her husband's pleasantries.

He called a little fire-eaten fragment of a poker at the sponging-house the Twelvepenny Nail, and a villainous old arm-chair hired out to him, and frequently withdrawn for days without explanation, he christened "the old Ticket of Leave."

Now certain domestic moralists or sensationists, who know no more of the nature Eleanor had to soothe than the quack who rubbed his patient's sore leg with rock-salt, might take exception to these levities, and pronounce them at once out of place and indecorous in such an awful situation. They would have had her enter with a tragedy slide, a good book of texts in her hand, and, taking a high afflicting stand, at once enact the ministering angel as she appears in penny tracts, or endeavor to overpower the poor prisoner at the first go off with a high-pressure devotion—in fact, directing against him an engine-hose of tears.

No, no; if you want to light a black hearth, put in a few slender inflammable fagots first, and then build up a very slight, well-ventilated edifice of coal above. You would apply the flame in vain to a compact dark mass damped and beaten well down.

Eleanor knew what was needful, and made no mistakes in her treatment; there was to be no scene so long as it could be avoided. But still within her own mind there was a corroding impatience and anxiety which was continually seeking for a vent.

Hitherto her husband reflected back her cheerfulness, and frankly disclosed by his manner the relief and courage her presence gave him; but when at last, in a well-assured voice, she began to speak of his perfect safety — of the provoking blunder which had been made that she was not called in as evidence at the inquest—when she glided

into such asseverations as the following, "You know, Will, I never left your side," and "How providential, Will, that you and I were together the whole night, and that I never lost sight of you!" From the moment she began to talk thus he shut himself up in reserve; his heart seemed to close to her; his face grew grave, and cold, and secret. The effect upon Eleanor of this change was one of alarm; it filled her with a restless uneasiness. The turnkey was sitting in the shadow beneath the great window listening to them, so she had spoken with a certain degree of circumstantial detail in his presence, on purpose that he might note it, and now unwittingly she had made him a witness to her husband's strange and equivocal reticence.

"Nellie, love," he said, taking up one of the books, called "Companions of my Solitude," which she had brought him, "read out to me; here is this thoughtful fellow just wanting your voice to make himself agreeable to us; give me one of his pleasant chapters."

She took the book and read out to him mechanically, heedless of stop or period, seeking impatiently for some excuse to lay it down. At last he relieved her himself from her irksome duty.

"Nellie," he said, "your visit to me to-day is nearly at an end. I wish so much, like a darling girl, you would do something for my sake."

"What is it, Willie? any thing you ask."

He paused a while, and said hesitatingly that he feared his request was scarcely fair; and then, as if he had changed his mind, he asked nothing of her only to take care of her health and expose herself to no hardship.

"That is the best cheer you can give me, Nell."

Then he asked how she had arranged about Johnnie, and, having learned, strongly advised her soon to follow him. At this suggestion Eleanor expressed much aggrieved surprise. She was here as one of the most important witnesses; as a matter of course, she must remain.

He let the subject rest, and having conversed with her about matters quite foreign to his situation for a while, in a kind, tranquil *tone, he told* her she had *better not stay any longer* that day.

"To-morrow, Nellie, I shall look out for you again. I am glad you have Michael with you. Make him take you a little drive into the country to cure these poor white cheeks."

"I know what you were going to ask, Will," she said, rising. "You want me to visit your mother. I shall do so."

He stooped down and kissed her, but said nothing just then; she could see, however, by the look he gave her, that she had guessed rightly. He followed her to the door.

"Remember, Nell, you are going to *cheer her*—to tell her from me to keep up heart, and all will go well. Say nothing to her except in that spirit, and you need not stay longer than just to say it. Do you understand, love?"

She promised him, but he made her repeat her promise, impressing it upon her, and then they parted affectionately.

Eleanor immediately obtained the necessary permission from the governor for this second visit. When she so readily granted the request which her husband had shrunk from making her, it was granted deliberately enough; but it was not until she was going down the long passage after the turnkey toward the female prisoner's cell that she felt the full repugnance rise within her to the meeting. That vision in the room, that red-handed figure that passed her on the landing, was before her imagination all the way. It was in this terrible plight she saw the old woman last; there will be an awful consciousness in the prisoner's look in meeting the only witness, save God and her fellow-prisoner, who saw her that night while heart and brain were hot with murder. Eleanor shrunk from the visit with all her nature, but she determined to go through with it somehow for her husband's sake.

Standing without the cell, she sent in her name to the prisoner, with a request to be allowed to see her for a few moments. She was immediately admitted, and the turnkey followed her in.

CHAPTER XX.

Mrs. Kent was sitting crouched beneath the window; she did not rise when she saw Eleanor, or ask her to be seated. She only said sullenly, "What want ye wi' me?"

Eleanor stood before her with an unsteady gaze, anxious to judge of the old woman's mood, but the face was so much in shadow that she could not even tell its expression. She spoke some words of formal kindness from herself, lip-deep and no more. Then she gave her husband's message of vague cheer, and departed with an unnoticed farewell.

Her husband showed an impatient anxiety to hear about this short visit when he met Eleanor next day; and when he had heard all she had to tell, so slight and unsatisfactory in detail, it was singular how well contented he appeared.

"You need not see her again, Nellie, till the danger which threatens us is past."

"Which threatens *us? you* too?"

Here again she began talking restlessly of his unquestionable safety—how mercifully God had ordered it that, among so many suspicious evidences, he had such complete proof of his innocence in her; but again he grew reserved and almost stern, resolutely shunting off the subject on some other line, or putting a book into her hands, that her lips might be otherwise employed till her time was up.

Thus was she thwarted day after day; sometimes she would let the subject sleep the whole hour through; but her mind began to get fevered, and she began to cast about her for some other resource. For once in her life she did not understand him, or, more correctly perhaps, was absolutely afraid to understand him. One morning, after such another of these interviews with him, in which he still spoke of all other matters freely, playfully, and lovingly, but still looked strange at her if she spoke of that which was aching in her thoughts, she left him much moved and perplexed in the extreme. She found old Michael, as was his faithful custom, waiting for her outside.

"Well, honey, how is Misther Will to-day?"

"Don't speak to me about him," she said, walking on quickly at his side.

Michael waited for a while, knowing well she would speak enough of him if *let alone.*

"*I can not understand* him, Michael," *she said, warmly;* "I don't know what he means; he will talk of any other trifling subject but the one which must be in both our thoughts. He is letting the precious time go by, and eluding me day after day. What shall I do? Michael, tell me, is there any danger?" she asked, tremulously, stopping short in the street.

"Danger! divil a taste. But I'll tell you what there's danger of—if you don't pull down your veil, we'll have all the bachelors of the town wid their spy-glasses up a staring at you. Your face is just the same to them that a honeycomb is to the flies."

"*You* are putting me off, too, like my husband; I'll stand it no longer," she said, stopping suddenly again.

"I tould you, honey, that Misther Will is as sure of his acquittal as you are of getting your landlady's bill. What can I say more? But don't—*don't* be stoppin' that way of a suddent on the street. That fat lady thought you were a goin' to spit in her face. Come along, honey; let me draw down your veil for you. That's it, tidy."

"What shall I do, Michael?" she said, hastening along by him again.

"What do you want to do, honey, afore I commit myself? for I am mighty nervous wid you of late. There's no knowin' when you may break out and whip off my head."

"I want to take the proper steps *immediately,*" she said, "for becoming a witness for the defense."

"Now you're talking sense, honey. Come wid me to the attorney's office, and tell him your story, and get yourself entered as a witness; and mind you tell him the whole story, and every little twist and turn as you told it to me: it was a very purty story, and looked likely. Maybe, widout hurting my conscience—which is rather tinder about kissin' the cross on a falsehood, though divil a harm there is in it, maybe, worse than a commonplace lie that the innocent childher might tell—batin' the legal objection—maybe I'll be able to support you myself when I'm called up. Sure there are one or two things I saw myself that night that I never mention in my prayers."

She took silent offense at his persistent skepticism, and did not address him again till they arrived at the attorney's lodgings. Here she received farther

advice from Michael as to the cautious arrangement of her plot, and she told him curtly, to his great surprise, that since he was so willfully offensive she would not ask his company farther; what she had to do she would do by herself. Truth, she said, required no lies to support it.

"Well, glory be to God for that, honey! Go up by yourself, and I'll wait for you here."

On sending up her name, she was at once shown up stairs.

The attorney, a kind old gentleman, adorned with a young wig, met her with a very solemn sort of kindness, which she threw aside as inappropriate. She took a high business tone, and bade him be so good as to receive her testimony about her husband at once, and enter her formally as one of the witnesses for the defense. She had been most criminally negligent hitherto in offering it (poor Nellie! not negligent, indeed).

He had his spectacles on, and he looked at her over them with his head bent forward, for he foresaw a great and violent scene approaching. There was the electric emotion pent up in its cloud rising on her face as he paused; he had better beware how he touched the spark.

"No doubt you have seen your husband, Mrs. Coleman?" said he, mildly.

"I have, sir; he is perfectly aware of what evidence I can give."

"And what does he say to it, my dear madam?"

"Say to it? My statement and his are identically the same; we both are as clear about facts as you and I are that I stand before you."

"Sit down, my dear madam."

"I want to make my statement at once," she said.

"I shall be very happy to hear any thing you have to say, madam. I am an old friend of your husband's, and employed upon his case, so you may be sure I should let nothing escape me which could be made available. But—"

He had better take care. That wild eye of hers is upon him; she can not brook circumlocution, and this daily wretched frustration in a matter clear as a sunbeam. If the old gentleman does not want a scene he had better step lightly here.

"*Tell me your story*, Mrs. Coleman, of course. But really our case is so good that we shall not need any farther assistance. I believe you were not called on the inquest?"

"No, I was not. Does that incapacitate me now?" she said, hurriedly.

"Well, well, it throws a difficulty, you know," he said, seizing on any pretense to put her off. "It's irregular, very irregular. And may I ask what your husband says? Ah!—hem—does he wish to have you called as his witness?"

"*He does not.* Every body seems to wish to blink the truth. I can hardly believe this is England I live in; I never before heard of such injustice."

"Ha! Your husband, you say, does not wish that you should be called for the defense? Oh! that puts it out of our power, you know; you must go to him, and talk it over with him, and then come to me. The fact is, my dear madam, he very naturally does not wish to have your name mixed up in a very shocking business, and I am sure you would not add to his pain. We have managed to keep you clear hitherto, and you really must not defeat his wishes."

"Tell me this," she said, with an assumed trembling calm, highly electric—"you will tell me this: since, if I understand you, I can not be a witness unless I am called by the prisoner, can I appear for the prosecution?"

"Ahem—our case is really a very safe one; I am in high spirits about it. The evidence against us is the slightest. Really we might only be encumbered by another witness. If I were not so very confident, my dear madam, it would be highly criminal to talk to you so sanguinely."

"If I saw you come out of that room with the blood of your landlady on your hands and shirt, and that she was found dead within," cried poor Eleanor, regardless of the offensiveness of her supposition, "could I, as a Christian conscientious woman, appear against you?"

"Certainly you could," said the attorney, with a blandly scandalized expression.

"Thank you, sir—that's all. I shall see my husband, then, to-morrow, and I know my true course now; I am not quite walled in yet, thank God."

She left him at once. Michael was waiting for her, strolling up and down

and when she met him she had forgotten the cause of offense. She said she wished to return home at once: all was now cleared up, and she had taken her resolution.

"Well, that's a good job, honey," said Michael, shortly; "and now we'd better go home."

They proceeded nearly half way home. Eleanor seemed wrapped in her secret resolution, and said nothing.

"Here we go, smooth and easy," thought Michael; "we'll have no more starts or sturks, with the help of God, till we get safe home."

But, even while he congratulated himself, Eleanor stopped abruptly again.

"What now, what now?" he said.

"If truth can not find its way into a court of justice, there's another field I never thought of till now."

"Very well; there's plenty of fields, and good heavy meadow-land too, before us. Come on now, honey; the best field just now for you is the carpet at home."

"I will appeal to the public in the papers; I will have my whole statement laid before them. These are not the days of the Inquisition, when people must suffer unheard."

"Bedad, you don't suffer unheard, honey; never say that while I'm by your side to deny it. What's on next?"

"Which is the chief paper in the town, Michael?"

"Well, I'm in the habit of getting in myself the 'Western Gazette,' because it's the most liberal, and the editor is a countryman of my own."

"What paper has the largest circulation?" she asked.

"No doubt the 'Wells Guardian' has the largest spread, because it's the most unprincipled; it's aisy to be wrong and spicy, and there's nothing pays so well. There's nothin' so flattering to dumb human natur that reads as the smart voice and bitin' tongue lent to it by cheeky human natur that writes. It nourishes a man's self-consait."

"I have heard of that paper when Mr. Coleman was engaged in his journal; I will see the editor to-day."

"Not wid my consent. You've had no dinner, and ye look like a wax doll *after a washing*. Not wid my consent *to-day*."

"*I will not bring* you with me, Michael, but before I rest I will go there, if you'll only put me in a cab and tell the man where to drive."

"Well, well, well! it's the little maol cow all over. I'll go wid you myself, honey, any where ye please, from the church door to the cider-cellar. Come along, in God's name, since you've taken it into your head."

She did not refuse his escort, and, inflamed by her new idea, she hurried him along into the thick of the city again, busily pondering in her mind how she would introduce herself, and how she would urge her petition for aid. She took a sensible, clear view of her chances, having had some experience of editors and journals, and what seemed hopeless and useless to her companion seemed to disclose to her a refuge and a beacon: all her late hope and courage again awoke. When the public know her story—when it lies before them in fair large type, the downright truth which to read was to test—then she might defy the law to do its worst. It dare not kill the innocent. When the public voice is once raised, it shall trumpet round the stern walls of black letter, and they must fall, and her husband come forth to her unhurt and stainless.

While wholly absorbed in these stimulating reflections, and yielding the guidance of her steps to her companion, confident he would lead her rightly, Michael suddenly laid his broad freckled hand upon her arm, and interrupted her reflections by the exclamation, "That's the cook went by this moment!"

"I don't know," said Eleanor, with a scared look. "Let us hasten on."

"Oh, bedad, I must see the cook—I've something to say to the cook."

"She's an insolent hard woman," said Eleanor, "and she means to give evidence against my husband."

"Let the woman's name alone, will you; she's as fine a woman as ever I seen on a street flag. Go on for a hundred yards on this side of the way till you come to No. 25 —— Street; that's the office of the paper. I'll call for you in an hour, and maybe bring you good news."

He left her abruptly, and gave pursuit to the servant, who was still in sight. He soon overtook her, and, plucking her by the shawl, addressed

her by name. She immediately recognized him.

"How are ye, cook? I never like to pass a friend by in bad times, for it's then you find a use for one."

"I'm not aware, Mr. Bryan," said the cook, bridling, "as you have any business with me. What do ye want with me, man?"

"Oh, nothin' partik'ler; nothing, except a respectful inquiry after your health. I'm very sorry, cook, for the trouble I gave you while I was a neighbor of yours."

"You was very troublesome, Mr. Bryan, you was, and if you'd been there much longer I'd have thrown up my situation."

"Well, you've done that anyhow, cook, and it's well for the family that'll get your services next, whoever they be. I never knew how a leg of mutton should be dressed till I ett a slice of your cooking, and I'm very delicate in my vittals ever since then."

"What's your business, Mr. Bryan?" said the cook, pulling up. "I can make my way where I'm going by myself."

"I've a kind message from the young misthress to you, cook," said Michael, in a sugary whisper.

"Mrs. Coleman ain't my mistress, and never was," said the cook, tossing her head and walking faster.

"Didn't she pay you your wages, cook, jewel, out of her own money?"

"Bless you, man! I've nothing to say to whose money it was; the money was due to me, and I consider I got it from Mrs. Kent."

"Well, but I tell you it was Mrs. Coleman's own money she gave you, rather than you should be at the loss, and it has been on her mind ever since that it never could have paid you for the injury it did to you bein' in that house during such a shockin' business."

"*My* character, Mr. Bryan, could not be touched in no manner."

"No, cook, jewel, but your feelins—them were hit hard: that is what Mrs. Coleman means."

"Mrs. Coleman didn't show no regard for my feelins when I complained of 'em to her, Mr. Bryan."

"Because for why, cook? she was in such a mortial fright, poor lady, herself, she could think of nothin' else but her *own feelins; but now* ye see, when she's had time to reflect, she sends a thrifle of compinsation for all your trouble and distress of mind." Here he slipped an open ten pound note into her hand. "There, that'll get you a little tay and sugar, cook, jewel, and we all feel for you deeply."

The cook was mollified, and crumpled the money into her pocket; she was seized with a sudden trembling of the hands.

"Now, cook," said Michael, the extreme corner of his eye playing over her fat face, just as a trout tackle twinkles temptingly over a stream, "Mr. Coleman was a kindly pleasant gentleman, my dear; he showed a very human timper toward that ruffian Kent up to the time he tuk him a little chastisement in the hall."

"Why, he was a very humane man, Mr. Bryan," said the cook, chiming in like a fiddle just screwed into tune; "bless you, he was a very humane man, Mr. Bryan; I remarked that to sev'ral."

"Sure we all heard you, cook, and we all said the same; and didn't he do his best to stop me from cracking Kent's skull them two nights when I sat up to take vingeance upon him? You wor witness to that, cook; you heard him reasoning wid me and wanting for to force the stick out of my hand?"

The cook acquiesced; she heard Mr. Coleman give as good as an hour's 'omily upon keeping the peace.

"An' now, cook, jewel," continued Michael, "I think you tould me that you remembered lyin' awake, and that you heard Mr. Coleman talkin' down stairs wid his wife five minutes afore we heard the wife screamin'?"

"Law, Mr. Bryan, I never said nothingk of the sort."

"Blood alive! but didn't ye hear 'em? We all were wide awake, and we all heard them talkin'."

"I heard 'em talkin', Mr. Bryan, certainly, but that ain't sayin' I heard them five minutes afore, which I certainly did not, Mr. Bryan," said the cook, getting nervous.

"Was it an hour before, dear? Consider, now, and take your time."

"Law, I couldn't say, or I couldn't swear, Mr. Bryan, if it was an hour or half an hour."

"Half an hour—very well," said Michael, nodding familiarly to her. "W

heard 'em talkin' together half an hour before, a sittin' over the fire in the small parlor, mind ye, cook. The misthress don't consider this thrifle in your pocket half enough to compinsate for all you've undergone — no, nor twenty pounds," continued Michael, with indignant sympathy, "no, nor twenty pounds, which she says she'll be able to pay you afther the trial, when she receives money she's expectin'."

Now whether the cook, who was upward of hardened fifty, had a conscience within, or was of a merely nervous temperament, it were idle and overcurious to decide; but from the moment she touched the money she had fallen to trembling, and now, at the mention of that twenty pounds *in futuro*, she trembled till her baggy cheeks shook.

"Law! she's very good, Mr. Bryan."

"She's a good lady, cook, and we all heard her talkin' with her husband over the fire in the little parlor one quarter of an hour afore we heard her screamin' up stairs. *I'll* swear that, and *you* can swear that, dear."

"Law, Mr. Bryan, I might say half an hour; I'm sure I heard 'em a speakin' together half an hour before."

"That'll do, cook—something short of half an hour—that'll do. Is Abram the coachman in town, dear?"

The cook informed him that the Abraham was in town, and lodging not far from herself.

"An' what compensation, now, would settle his feelins?" said Michael; "I'd like to take your advice."

"Bless you, Mr. Bryan, I wouldn't be too particular wi' him; he's a bothered old man—he don't care."

"Well, and Simon, how's his feelins? Do you bring me where I'll get a few minutes' talk wid him, cook. I'll jist walk a bit behind you, if you plase; the feelins are private and tinder, you know; we'll have no one prying into thim. Show me the way to get talk wid him."

The cook informed him that Simon was also in town, and, knowing his haunts, she had no doubt she could find him at once, if Mr. Bryan would follow her so that they might not be seen together.

"And come to the misthress for twenty pounds after the trial, cook. You're a very lucky woman, though you're a thrifle too sensitive; that's your only fault."

At a wary distance, he followed the cook's plump figure through the streets till she came to a rather disreputable-looking alley, in which were cheap lodgings and one or two low shops, including a public house at the corner. The cook stopped, and beckoning to Michael, pointed to the latter resort. She said he'd be sure to find Simon within, but begged him not to say who told him. Then, with a courtesy, she turned back and left him, while Michael entered without a moment's hesitation into the retail department, and found himself tolerably at home: no doubt he had been in such a place once or twice before in his life.

He looked around him, but no Simon stood there. The landlady was rinsing her pewter, and some drowsy porters were smoking and boozing their quart of malt between them; but he looked in vain for the freckled face and horsy legs of the groom. Nothing daunted by the disappointment, he ordered a gill of rum at the bar, and entered the little smoky parlor. There, indeed, he found his man; but scarcely it seemed his opportunity, for Simon sat at the sloppy table with two choice mates of his own tastes and costume, drinking gin neat and smoking long clay pipes tipped with red wax, which they had selected from the chimney-piece. No sooner did Simon set his dissipated eyes upon Michael than he recognized him, and, winking at his two companions, signified to them that he was about to draw this old badger for their amusement.

"Well, gov'ner," said he, familiarly, "how are you swimmin' along these times?"

"Faith, Simon," said Michael, leisurely, as he took his seat opposite them, "I'm shwimmin with the sthream as I always do, and you couldn't do better yourself, boy: only let me tache you how."

"I know'd it was you as was outside, old buck."

"And how did ye know that, Simon, boy? Maybe it was by my English accent?"

"By that Hirish brogue of yourn. Why, man, it was like an old huntin'-horn wi' a crack in its wizen," said Simon, winking at his companions.

"It's like a delicate taint on a haunch

of venison, Simon, and nothin' else," said Michael, winking round also. "Now, my lad, what'll you and your friends take? I'll stand ye any thin' ye like in raison."

"You will, will ye?" said one of them, who was dressed in a cast livery suit. "Then order in a pipe of old port, and be d—d to you."

"Oh, keep in raison, lad, and especially don't be too clever, for that's what lost ye your last place, Bill. Come, boys, here's the taste of rum I ordered for myself, and I'll stand ye a go of brandy round hot."

They all concurred in his suggestion, and Michael gave the necessary orders. When the brandy arrived his companions began to chaff him again.

"Come, gov'ner," said one of them, "what's the Hirish receipt for mixing punch?"

"Three of wather to one of whisky," said Michael, promptly, "which manes that three Englishmen to one Irishman is a fair match."

They could not take a rise out of old Michael; he held his own with them till they tired of it, and presently began to treat him with more consideration. He proved himself a generous boon companion, for he ordered them in a second round of brandy, and a third and a fourth, till one of the men rose with a hiccough, and, having business abroad, lurched away.

"Good afternoon to you," said Simon, waving an adieu after him with his pipe; "you be'ant on the loose like this old gentleman and me. I like this 'ere old Hirish cock, and I'll finish my chat with him."

"Whisper, Simon," said Michael, edging round to the same side of the table; "get rid of 'em both, boy. If you want to take them things of yours out of pawn, now's your time, and I'm the friend you're lookin' for." He enforced this hint with a slow, powerful, penetrating nudge. Simon looked at him stupidly, unable to guess whether Michael was humbugging him or really meant something to his advantage. He paused for a few moments to ponder over it; he smoked a while upon it, and looked at Michael, who still nodded and winked seductively like a jolly old satan, striking his hand against his waistcoat pocket till his large seals jingled. Michael, Michael, if your admirers and fellow-jurors but saw your heart now! you, who have been foreman of an intelligent jury so often—you, who have joined in that scandalized murmur when the perjury of a witness was exposed in court—you, who have plumed yourself on your indignant virtue when your landlord, in soliciting your vote, made some irrelevant allusions to your lease. To what base uses have you come at last! Your country blushes for you, Michael.

"I say, Bill," said Simon, "you've had enough, and if you han't you'll get no more—which is a sum as gives the same quotient—so you might as well clear out. This 'ere gentleman and I have partik'ler business."

The man took the hint good-humoredly, having been treated well, and, shaking hands with Mr. Bryan, he departed like his fellow.

Then Michael went freely to work, and made up for lost time. He placed a sovereign in the man's hand.

"Do you know what an airnest means, Simon?"

"Why, if it's that 'ere," grinned the man, closing his hand on the coin, "it's like I'll know what an airnest means again."

"I've a pocket full of 'em," whispered Michael, making his pocket jingle. "An airnest, Simon, is a sort of a promise to pay."

"You're a pleasant old fellar—let's have another o' them airnests afore you cool," said the groom, holding out his hand again.

"Come to me, my lad, on the fust of October—that's my pay-day—I'll give you ten sovereigns down, and I'll find you a good place that I have my eye upon. Mind ye, all the money Kent was sporting at large has found its way back to its rightful owner, and it's Mr. Coleman's now, boy—the fust of October is pay-day."

Both men puffed slowly at their pipes, with their eyes fixed on the opposite wall for a while. At length Simon remarked with business gravity, "That's the day arter the trial, gov'ner."

"You've a better head for calculatin' than I have, Simon; but, if you see any connection between them ten sovereigns and the thrial, that's no business of mine

Now, to talk of other matters a hundred miles away from the point, how do you think Mr. Coleman will come off, Simon?"

"How do I think? Why, there's a rope round his neck."

"Bedad, I've just made a queer blunder, Simon; but there's no great harm done. Them ten sov'reigns ain't owin' to you at all."

The groom looked at Michael's waistcoat pocket like a terrier watching a rat in a cage.

"Wait till we see now, Simon," said Michael, smoking with a continual flutter of little puffs. "If my recollection sarves me right, you tould the coroner the hatceht that was missin' was on the shelf the day before. Think well, now. Mightn't it have been the iron fluke of an ould skillet that was up there when ye looked the next day?"

Simon said nothing, and Michael continued looking at him with vigilant eyes.

"If my recollection sarves me right, there was a tinker who was mendin' pots in the scullery a fortnight before, and it's as likely a thing as a rainy day that he whipped off that hatchet into his wallet. Why, man, there's nothing like a good memory in life; they say it's a good long memory wid six telescope points to it, that and his dainty fine voice, that made the Lord Chancellor of England."

Simon said nothing.

"If my recollection sarves me right, Simon, I remember your telling me that it was known all over the country how Kent was sportin' his money, and that he was comin' home that very night wid some hundreds in goold and silver in his pocket—eh, boy?"

Simon grunted assent.

"And who was them two dark fellars," said Michael, in a ruffian whisper, "one in an ould fustian jacket and the other in a smock, who was lyin' in the fence all the day, and who startled you when ye went to catch the colt for Mr. Coleman? Bedad, I believe it's twenty sovereigns I owe you, and not ten, on the fust of October—eh, Simon? A man in fustian, and a man in a smock."

"Wid a felt wideawake on his head," muttered Simon, reflectively.

Michael began to pat him on the back gently and solemnly; with the other hand he put another sovereign on the table before him.

"And the other had a red handkercher round his head," continued Simon, looking into vacancy as he pocketed the second sovereign, unconsciously, as it were.

Down went another sovereign, and another long affectionate caress from Michael, who then rose with an expression of import and dignity, and bade Simon speak the truth like a man, and work his memory—"a man's memory is his bank or his jail, which he plases." With many such admonitions, shy, cautious, and affectionate assurances, Michael left him; and when he got into the fresh daylight, he spat out on the pavement like a man who comes out of a pest-room. Oh, Michael, Michael

CHAPTER XXI.

And now for a dash of sunshine upon poor Eleanor's path. The rain can not always be falling, or the waves buffeting; in the tossing course of this poor craft came a sudden sleek, and she swam placidly for a while.

She made her way into the office of the "Guardian," and looked bewildered around, standing, as she did, in the midst of tall, pew-like boarding, no human head in sight. Concluding that there must be an entrance somewhere, she carefully examined the premises, and observed the words "Editor's Box." Now, if she had but her statement written fairly out, she could drop it in so readily, and to-morrow it might fly abroad through the world. But now she must plead in person as her husband's advocate. At one side of the letter-slit was a square orifice, through which she looked into the office; but there was no one there. A large scrapbook lay open upon the table, all bepasted with newspaper slips, cut by busy scissors.

As she withdrew her eyes from this empty office, and once more gazed round anxiously, she observed a door in the recess with "private" printed across its panels. It was no time with Eleanor for nice observations of rule, and she knew too much of an editor's sanctum to respect its badge of privacy. She

went forward boldly, and knocked; but, receiving no answer, she opened the door gently, and stood under it a framed vision—a hesitating, pale, but beautiful woman in black silk. To whom did this vision of our heroine appear?

To none else than the elegant Jew-featured, light-timbered Mr. Baines, in all the agonies of his leader upon a great local topic.

With languid irritability he looked up, and, perceiving it was a lady, he waved her in and to a chair.

"I want to see Mr. Swan," she said; "is he within?"

"Nobody ever sees an editor till eleven o'clock," said Mr. Baines, with a lift of his brows. "I beg pardon, but I never suffer myself to be interrupted till I've finished my leader. Pray take a seat."

"Thank you. I wanted to see Mr. Swan on business of the last importance," said Eleanor.

"To him or to you?" said the quill-driver, with a graceful insolence.

"My business is with Mr. Swan, sir," said Eleanor, with dignity. "Pardon me for having interrupted you; I will write to Mr. Swan."

She was retreating when Baines, happening to be stimulated by her reply to look her full in the face, observed that she was rarely pretty and soft.

"Pray do not go, ma'am. Mr. Swan is likely to chance in here in half an hour or so; it is probably worth your while to wait so long. Pray sit down here near the fire," he said, giving the stove a gentle poke. "I shall finish my leader, if you do not mind."

Eleanor sat down, and Mr. Baines, before settling again to his periods, with a consumptive sweetness of air offered her his cigar-case, when, observing his error by the reproof of her coldly-averted gaze, he again asked pardon many times, assuring her it was his full intention to hand her the newspaper. She declined his civility, and Mr. Baines, being now piqued into making himself agreeable, immediately descended from his lofty reserve, and, laying down his pen, became very communicative. He told her what journals he had written for; how he had given up light literature many years, and did *nothing now but politics*. He told her *how he preferred* a provincial paper to an appointment on the staff of "The Times," because he felt his power more in the provinces; and he had some distant views of entering Parliament. He sought her sympathy by a fond tale of his declining health, and the awful irregularity of his life—up till three, then home to his villa in Pimlico, and a *petit souper* of a spatchcock, perhaps, and a bottle of sparkling Moselle, served up by loving hands.

Ah! Baines, thou boaster! Mind you of the time when in London you told me the same Oriental tale, until one night, dropping in at the low, fishy tavern well known to all your tribe, I caught you supping on broiled sole and anchovy sauce, with a pewter pint of pale ale at your uplifted elbow. I know not as to the loving hands at home. Were they the leathern claws of thy charwoman? Mr. Baines also informed his companion, we can not say auditor, that he was of a very morose cast of mind, and found the "Guardian" a capital absorbing medium for all his acerbity and personal enmities, the daily discharge of such feelings being perfectly innocuous, for the editor was always on his track to dash his pen pleasantly across the "foul and leprous distillation."

Eleanor sat by the stove, neither impatient, angry, nor interested — only deaf. His voice fell meaningless upon her ear, for an earnest eloquence was stirring the blood in her heart—how she would plead her cause before the public, and how she would win this editor to send the truth to the four winds. There came a long step without, the door was flung open and let slam behind a tall, thin gentleman, who stood seven feet to the crown of his hat. His countenance was high-featured and sanguine, with a certain grave rollick in it, and, moreover, a certain comprehensiveness of glance.

"Mr. Swan, madam," said Baines. "This lady wants to speak to you on important business." Mr. Swan bowed, and courteously bade Eleanor, who had started to her feet, to be seated again. He seized on Mr. Baines's comfortable chair for himself without the faintest apology, leaving that languid Junius leaning mournfully against his desk in his worsted slippers.

"Excuse me one moment, madam,"

said Mr. Swan, pulling out slips from his pocket and beginning to mutter over them, correcting the press as he proceeded. Junius affected an unnatural ease and indifference during the process, by which you might have guessed the editor was inspecting one of his great leaders.

"I say, Baines, 'going into a man's interior'—that's a queer phrase."

Baines was ruffled, yet he smiled foolishly, still affecting indifference.

"Better see the context of the sentence, Mr. Swan," he observed.

Eleanor in a great strain of mind waited impatiently for an opening to speak, their trifling seemed so strange and out of keeping to her eager desires and fears. The editor conned on busily, pen in hand, for a while, saying, as he turned over each eloquent slip, "Yes, I dare say that will do pretty well," till he came to another passage which suspended his pen.

"I say, Baines, what the devil do you mean here—'the arterial rupture begins to laminate?'"

"A surgical figure which pointedly applies," said Mr. Baines, with a quiet shrug of pity for his editor's intelligence.

"Hanged if I can dissect it," muttered Mr. Swan. Presently, while Baines smiled with *effete* significance over at Eleanor, Mr. Swan drew his pen through a long passage, doubtless of that "foul and leprous distillation" which so relieved Mr. Baines's system. When the last slip had been turned over, the editor, still apparently ignoring the presence of his pale expectant visitor, held a little business conversation with his underling, and told him in a flattering, confidential, refinedly humbugging tone that his great leader of last week *had told.*

"Why, you did not seem to like it?" lisped Mr. Baines.

"I like it now. I have watched the course of the rocket, sir; it has hit the mark."

"Now, madam?" he said, turning to Eleanor with a polite reminiscence of her presence.

That little polite question was the *match to the train.* She began excitedly—*how could she otherwise?*—and told *him who she was and* why she had come *there. Mr. Swan* was all attention at the name, and she told him the whole story how all had happened that night—a story she had now got off by heart, and which she could not recount but with passionate fluency and tearful emphasis. It was more stirring than that outcry of Juliet in the vaults. She spoke of the pitiless injustice under which she was sinking. Nobody would listen to her evidence because she had chanced not to be examined at the inquest, and because her husband had some scruples against exposing her before a court.

That editorial portion of Mr. Swan's heart which stood conscience to his paper did actually believe every word she spoke, and, in effect, this was all that was needful for the comfort of this stricken deer who fled to him for succor. He told her fairly, however, that in making public such a statement before the trial he would be liable to severe comment, and the judge would be likely to reprobate his philanthropy to the jury as very improper and premature.

"Nevertheless, madam, my paper is open to you; I am willing to meet these attacks in so good a cause. This gentleman's genius is pledged to you, and I've no doubt many of the papers will follow suit with us, so that we'll have the public sympathy on our side."

On our side! that was a happy phrase; Eleanor almost smiled with pleasure and hope. So here was the public press about to make common cause with poor friendless her. In the fullness of her heart, she mentioned the name of her husband's class newspaper, deceased, and Mr. Swan held out to her his glassy hard palm, telling her he had often heard of it, and in a professional sense might call her his sister. He asked her to dine with himself and his wife: he would send his phaeton for her: and when on the plea of her great anxiety of mind she declined his invitation, he went out and got a cab for her himself, paying the cabman privately his fare, and, returning, took down her direction, while Mr. Baines was assuring her affectedly of his enthusiasm in her cause. Finally, they both bowed her into the cab with every honor.

"We shall spare no effort to give your peculiar case a fair public hearing, my dear Mrs. Coleman, regardless of

all censure. You really must not despond," said he, as he lifted his hat to her, and she was driven away.

"A queer scene that, Baines; you ought to make a good sensation thing of that, eh?"

"She's the prettiest woman I ever beheld, sir. By Jove! if that impassioned appeal had been made before the Haymarket foot-lights, the whole house would break into a thunder-storm."

"A thunder-storm, eh! what's that upon your cheek, man? Is that a thunder drop? I'm going to have an oyster at Sillery's; come, and we'll slip that pearl into one before it dries. You may write me a leader on these mysterious disclosures for to-morrow."

Let me here testify warmly to Mr. Swan's solicitous and substantial kindness to poor forlorn Eleanor. However the censors of justice may condemn the use he put his columns to, his conduct shall pass unchallenged by me. A sensible paragraph under the head of the "HILL SIDE MURDER—IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES," appeared in the next morning's paper, penned by himself, in which he did full justice to her statement, pointing out to public consideration that it coincided exactly with the statement of the male prisoner — dwelling feelingly upon the high religious character he understood Mrs. Coleman to bear with all who were honored by her acquaintance, etc., and urging in a few concluding words a merciful caution in the conduct of the trial.

There shone forth also an eloquent leader from Junius, commenting upon the important disclosures in a spirit of great zeal, some short passages of which may be quoted here.

"None could hear Mrs. Coleman's account of that fearful night," exclaimed Junius, in full torrent, "not even the most hardened skeptic to purity and sincerity, without feeling the glow of truth and simple faith that pervades it. A hard, dry detail of the circumstances such as she recounts might present indeed some *primâ facie* improbabilities, and what detail based upon nature will not offer the same? Fiction fits nicely with calculated ingenuity, and is susceptible of precise adaptation. Nature is ever whimsical and full of surprises. But when the hard succession of facts are all embodied in appropriate strata of feeling, impulse, small characteristic circumstances before and after, and all the subtle train of cause and effect is ranged before us, then we can judge and feel what is truth."

Mr. Coleman's honorable antecedents were strongly put forward, and a high eulogium passed upon his honorable conduct in business. Farther, the article sneered at the simplicity of country juries who could have blundered into such a verdict as to imagine a poor old lady well-turned of sixty to be capable either physically or morally of committing such a deed; and after duly dwelling upon the extravagance of such a supposition, concluding by a most plausible suggestion, elsewhere put forward, viz., the peculiar temptation to such an outrage presented by Mr. Kent's notorious prodigality to the many loose characters infesting the neighborhood of late, there being, moreover, peculiar facilities to the burglar in the peculiar situation of the house.

Eleanor was kept pretty busy all that evening in her lodging supplying material for this defense, and a printer's devil stood in the hall in attendance upon her. A basket of choice fruit was left for her with Mr. Swan's compliments, which she set aside, not to be tasted till shared with her husband. A half dozen of wine also arrived, which Mr. Swan apologized for sending on the plea of there being no good wine sold in the town.

Next morning four copies of the newspaper arrived, containing all this triumphant vindication. She settled down to read it, but her heart throbbed so at every sentence that she was absolutely unable to proceed; she could only glance at it from point to point—all so fair, so copious, and so strong—through tears of distilled joy and hope. Here the servant brought up word that Michael was waiting below in the hall for her, and she wished that he might be immediately shown up. Now there was a certain touch of the ludicrous in the meeting of these allies this morning. In came Michael smiling at one door, and out of her bedroom sallied Eleanor smiling at the other; and the pleasure which tickled Michael, and the triumph that inspired Eleanor at the moment, God wot, were a world apart.

"Good news, honey," whispered Michael, mysteriously.

"Good news, Michael," sung out Eleanor at the same moment, like a morning lark.

"Oh! you heard it, then, Michael?" she asked.

"Bedad, you've guessed it, honey; I see you've guessed what came of my talk with the cook."

"That's not it, Michael," she said.

"Bedad, that's it, honey, you may take your oath."

"I meant to tell you, Michael, how my evidence is all published in the papers."

"Bedad, I know nothin' about the papers, honey, but you may call the cook and groom witnesses for the defense."

"Oh, indeed! I fear nothing they can say," she replied. "Here, Michael, sit down, and, before you say another word, read that."

She sat him down with a playful pretense of authority, and placed the paper in his hands. Michael put on his spectacles deliberately, and began to read with moving pendulous lip; he studied the eloquent page for half an hour, but without the slightest expression of surprise or pleasure, while she was watching to see the gathering effect.

"Well," she said.

He laid down the paper at last, and folded up his glasses.

"Well," she repeated, "is not that conclusive?"

"If it twarn't for the long words," said Michael, "it would be mighty pleasant reading in a railway train."

"I don't understand you," said Eleanor, reddening.

"Don't be angry with me, dear. I say it's as good reading as any counselor's speech that I ever heard, and better, only it's dumb print; but it don't blindfold the consciences of twelve men as a counselor's speech has often done for a half hour till the charge puts an extinguisher on him. There's a game in the meadows wid them balls of thistledown that the childer are always a playin', and the judge plays that game wid these same flowery speeches and newspaper articles. He houlds it in his hand and gives a puff, then he presents the bald stalk to the jury."

"But that you're an old friend of my husband's I would not answer you," cried Eleanor; "you have been no support to me; instead of it, you've been undermining all my hope every day. I am sorry I ever asked you to accompany me here." She had lost all patience this morning; the fire had kindled at Michael's apathy, and she spoke with a bitter warmth.

"Haven't I, eh?" said Michael. "So I warn't polling for you all day yesterday, and selling my sowl for you, and the sowls of all the witnesses, so as to upset the prosecution?"

"If you mean you were employing bribery to tempt them into falsehood, you have been acting without mine or my husband's sanction, and doing your best to drive away God's blessing from our cause."

With these words she vanished from the room, shutting her bedchamber door.

Now Michael had laid out, as we know, a large sum out of his own purse for the furtherance of her cause, and was still more lavish of his character. The damage to his conscience was not much to speak of, perhaps, and in his outlawed sympathy for Misther Will and his pet he would not have grudged four times the amount; but her reproaches hurt him in heart and pride, and the disappointment in being silenced before he could have the gratification of describing to her his adroitness aggrieved the old man most of all. He went away angry, and let her shift for herself.

Eleanor got on her walking things impatiently, and with the fruit under her shawl, and the folded paper in her hand, she hasted out into the drizzling rain. The peculiar bent and bias of the woman's character was now afire; her special attribute was in feverish play. She had got hold of comfort, and was carrying it home like the anxious summer bee with the wax on its thigh. "How will this full, glorious defense lighten his gloom!" she thought, as she winged along.

To prove more pointedly than mere assertion that this impulse that was upon her arose from the genuine instinct of her class, and that she was hasting not so much to help or to save as to comfort, it is only necessary to observe as she dwelt in thought upon the latter paragraph, which was directed toward the exculpation of his mot

er. "That's what will comfort poor Will," she thought; "and maybe, by God's mercy, he may not drive me to extremity."

She was alluding to a fixed determination she had made after her interview with her husband's attorney, and which still rested in her mind beneath all this hope and triumph as a last desperate resort. Should he persist in refusing her evidence, she hoped this good news would elicit his consent.

She obtained admission as usual, and met the accustomed affectionate welcome from her husband.

"Come to read to me, Nell? I've been lonely, love."

"I am come to read to you, Will," she said, sitting by him and rustling open the newspaper before him. When she had made him understand what it was she had brought him, she voiced the poor flowery stuff with such intense feeling and appreciation that she was nearly overcome; and then she turned to see the effect upon him, and he did not disappoint her. Whatever he might secretly have thought of it, he echoed her pleasure, not commenting, indeed, upon special points, but with a general congratulation and approval of the whole. At his request she read out to him a second time the passage which sought to exculpate his mother; upon that he dwelt strongly in detail, and on that alone. He spoke in glowing terms, indeed, of the conduct and daily exertions of his faithful wife, covering her with praises. Yet Eleanor was surely hard to please, and had better have rested satisfied with her success. Her uneasiness returned, and the determination, never absent from her, to drive him into admissions, and claim from him to receive her as a witness. Then came the frost, and all her blushing honors were shed; after his usual fencings and doublings from her pursuit, he fell into complete reserve. Eleanor let the newspaper drop at her feet.

"Will, you have acknowledged the truth of the statement I have given to the public respecting yourself. It was your own statement also. You and I both know it to be true. Why will you not let us talk it over? We must talk it over at last, for you must call me as your *witness*."

"*Nell, Nell, you* have been sensible and happy this morning, and your presence has made me happy too; but you must have seen in all your other visits that the subject you want to force on me is one I can not discuss."

"Say you will call me as a witness, and I have done," said Eleanor.

"You are under some unhappy mistake, Nell; I have not the power. Read out to me a little, like a good girl."

"Will, I've been in a foolish flurried plight in all my other visits, and it is no use; my mind is now made up as to the only course open for me."

"Yes?" said he, interrogatively. "I fancy, Nell, the best thing for you to do is — nothing, but hope. Our counsel takes a sanguine view; there does not seem sufficient evidence to convict either my mother or me, so we shall all live in hope and prayer."

"I am grateful to you, Will, for entering upon the evidence with me even so far."

"Yes, so far. But if you wish to cheer me, Nellie, leave the rest of it to my counsel and me. He has frequent *private* access to me"—he pressed her arm significantly—"and you may be sure he will omit nothing. Here is Endymion, Nell, and my favorite opening passage. Come, I want to fancy myself among the fields with you: read it to me." He placed the book in her hand, but she pushed it impatiently away.

"Never again till we are safe at home," she said. "I must question you at last. I entreat you to answer my questions; but, if you do not, I am free to act firmly for you as I think right."

"This is not like you, Nellie; I thought you would be all sunshine this morning. Be silent, darling, upon that subject."

"Do you want me to murder you by my silence?"

She paused a moment, but he turned over the leaves of his book, unheeding her.

"I complain that you are changed. I scarcely recognize you as my husband. You seem to me to have grown reserved and selfish, and hardened toward me."

"Drop the subject, Nellie. We are not private, and you pain me."

"Are you afraid of the subject?"

"Let us say, then, that I am."

"Oh, but I know you better," she cried. "You feign every day with me, but now I will not cease; I will not leave you till I have once for all cleared up my doubt."

"Let us put off this conversation, then, till you are calm," he said. "Surely, if I know what you know of this business, Nell, that ought to content you, unless you can tell me something new. Here, read me a little; it will cheer me."

"I will not read—I will not sleep, or eat, or quit this till I hear your intentions and your meaning in this reserve to me. I have not deserved to have my rest and my heart broken," she said, with a smothered sob.

"Keep up, darling—don't yield this way. I'm afraid you are not strong enough for these visits."

"Did I prove myself unworthy of your confidence in other times of difficulty and danger?"

"You proved yourself the noblest, truest counselor and wife," he said, heartily. "I seem only to be cruel now, but it is not for want of love and thought for you. I am only selfish in this: I want to spare myself the added grief of increasing your suspense and trouble. Come, cheer up, love: I can't bear to see you crying."

"Crying?" she sobbed out; "I shall cry day and night by-and-by. What right have you," she exclaimed, with wayward vehemence — "what right have you to sacrifice *me* to *her?* You want to save your mother with your foot upon my life."

"Hush! hush! Ask me any questions you please. I will answer you, and strive to satisfy you — there. A scene is not advisable, darling—there. My solicitor could answer you any thing you pleased far better than I."

She sat herself suddenly erect by him, and turned her face to his.

"Whatever he could tell me," she said, "would come better from you."

"Well, true. Now gently, Nellie, gently."

"I am the only witness you have," she began; "my evidence is full, direct, and complete. All that you know of this murder, I know, and if you are placed in the dock, so should I."

"*Hush! these are not questions.*"

"*They are assertions,*" she said; "are *they not true?*"

"My dear Nellie, it is true you love me very dearly," he said, quietly.

"Are they not true? are they not true? I ask you before this man," she said, pressing her vantage, and grasping at his wrist.

"Before this man," he said, in stern reproof, "I will not answer you. He remembers my position better than you."

That silenced her for a moment; she withdrew her cold hands and dropped them by her side like a wounded bird.

"Go to my attorney, like a good girl, Nellie, and he will explain every thing to you. Have a quiet private talk with him, and then come back to me to comfort me with your company, not to torture me."

"I have been with him, Will; he will not accept my evidence," moaned she.

"Why?"

"He says you will not have my name touched by this disgrace; but that is sickening folly — *worse*, it is wicked," she said, mustering her spirit again. "Answer me now—you promised to answer me — are you going to reject me as a witness?"

"I will answer you: I have no power, love, to call you or reject you."

"Are you going to shake my statement to the court? Deal fairly with me before you commit me, for with God's help I shall appear."

"I am not going to shake any statement, Nell; I shall not even speak. Come, you are under delusion; we have a good case, thank God, and your evidence will not be needed."

"Not needed?" she cried. "Why—why, you have no other evidence than mine?"

"It is happily needless," said he, "so slight is the case against me; and I shall not have the pain of seeing you come into a large public court, Nell, under a dreadful vulgar stare, to be insulted and puzzled into contradictions by impudent counsel till they absolutely convicted me — fancy that; and then we should have all your foolish frightened replies sauced up in every paper through the kingdom. Why, you'd be escorted home by all the ragamuffins in the town, striving to get a peep at you. Thank God, my girl, we'll both be spared from such shame."

"Shame!" she repeated, clinging to

him. "I tell you, Will, when it is your lot I share I'd rather have it than half a throne."

He caught her nestling figure into him with a moment's ecstasy of pride and gratitude. "I'd face the world with you, love," he said, tenderly. "And so they never told you—they never told my poor girl?"

"Told me what?" she cried, breaking from him in a terror. "Any bad news?"

"No bad news. There, be tranquil; it is old, old news, old as the laws. Don't be uneasy, Nell; we shall have a quiet talk, as you wished, about this same evidence of yours; we don't mind who hear us. There, don't look so wild; there is nothing I have to tell you worth that wild-fowl look. Now, Nellie, I suppose you, who have quite a business experience, remember that in business matters a wife is not recognizable as an agent in law. She is supposed to be under her husband's influence and control. If you had debts, Nellie, which you never had—debts for bonnets, and shawls, and trinkets, which you are reasonably fond of, on reckoning day against whose name would these debts be entered?"

"You are trifling with me. But to-day I will not be set aside; you must meet my questions," she said, again recalled by his light manner to her resolve and mettle.

"I am meeting your questions, Nell, but I may choose my own way. Who is liable for those debts, you or I?"

"You would be," she said, impatiently.

"And if it were to be sued for non-payment in a court of law, whose name would head the action, yours or mine?"

"Yours."

"And so poor Nellie seems to have no existence in law," he said, looking in her face with a nervous calculation and a forced smile.

"I see your drift, but you are not putting it fairly. I have read cases in the newspaper too often to be deceived. If a wife commits a felony, her husband is not answerable—she will be tried by herself; so she *has* existence in law."

"I am talking of a wife's evidence, Nellie," he said, solemnly watching her. "*You are supposed to* be under my *complete influence*, and your statement is assumed in law to be under my undue direction. The law exists chiefly in mercy, that a wife may not be forced to appear against her husband; but if she would appear for him, it is naturally supposed she is in collusion with him; don't you understand? She is, in fact, flesh of his flesh, and must be pardoned should she perjure herself for his sake."

"You can not deceive me," she said, indignantly. "You know well I was called as a witness in your examinations in the court of bankruptcy, and gave evidence perfectly good in law as to the surrender of all your property."

"That was a civil case," replied her husband, "and the law with respect to civil cases is altered; but in criminal cases—"

"In matters of life and death, you would tell me," she said, vehemently, "a wife is silenced, when a word from her would save her husband's life. It is not true—I do not believe you; if I believed that, it would kill me," cried poor emphatic Eleanor.

"If you will not believe me, I suppose you will not be advised by me," he said, gently, for he feared to crush her so soon.

"What is your advice?"

"Go home to your lodging, Nell, and—"

"What can I do there?" she cried, passionately.

"Pray for me, Nellie. I have not been able to pray," he said, tenderly. "I have been living without any system in my thoughts, and prayer may perhaps be done by deputy, as sin can be expiated by it. All I shall want of my darling is her prayers. We have found prayers avail us — have we not, Nell?—for peace and endurance when things came to the worst."

He was determined to soften her. "You remember how you prayed all night when baby girl was taken ill?"

"Ay, I remember praying all night," she said, with a fiery quickness, "and in the morning baby died. No, with God's help I shall act now. I see the course you are taking, and I will frustrate you."

"Frustrate me, Nellie?"

"Yes." She drew from his side, and stood before him all alight with an heroic mutiny. "You told on the inquest but *half the truth*. You have since the

in act and demeanor, assumed the part and endured the stigma of a guilty man. How long is this to continue?"

"I shall meet my trial, Nell, I trust, in the same patient hope with which I endure my imprisonment and disgrace," he said, with unnatural quietude, turning his steel blue eyes upon her flushed face. "Try to share my hope."

"Then let this jailer bear witness," she cried, "since I can not give evidence for you because I am your wife—there my inability ceases—you shall not die for another's crime. *I will denounce your mother!*"

"Nell," he said, "let this scene end, for your own sake; you are building up after regret for yourself. My mother takes her trial under the same indictment as I do, and you can no more be a witness against her than for me. This honest man whom you have called upon to listen will allow for your strange avowal, I am sure, and respect your motives. But for you, Nellie, remember this: whether I escape this great peril or not, the day that sees my mother brought to the scaffold will see you a widow."

His words, so quietly delivered, stunned her. She replied no more; her fiery spirit sunk, and she drooped away upon the bench, and sat tearless and trembling, overcome by a sort of abashed remorse.

He let her sit in silence a few minutes. Then he rose and kissed her gravely, and, taking her bonnet and shawl from his bed, attired her himself.

"Go to your lodging, darling Nell. Things are not as bad as you imagine. The evidence against us is slight, and in a few days now all may be well. You have duties yet, Nell—not foolish Quixotic duties, which only injure where they are meant to serve. Stay with your child, Nell. Go to your sister, and keep out of all this business till it is happily ended."

She let him lead her to the door, which the turnkey opened, and she bade him a bewildered adieu.

* * * * * *

The next morning she entered the gate subdued, and yearning for forgiveness, and she applied for admission. *She was refused.* The prisoner had *given strict directions* to have no one *admitted but his* attorney. She left the place shocked; the streets, and houses, and people seemed swimming before her eyes. What has she done that it should have come to this?

Old Michael was upon his post outside, waiting for her trustily. He looked at her as she came out, and he did what he had never done before—came up close to her and bade her take his arm.

"Pull your veil close about you, dear, and take my arm; we'll go home."

She let her veil be, but, accepting his support, she walked beside him up the street, without the heart to speak a word. People stared at her pretty face, hueless as if she had risen from a sick-bed, and from her their gaze would fall upon the long-snouted face of her companion, bending his stout round back to her — mincing with his ponderous feet to keep step with her. They wondered what queer mad couple was this who had come to town. Some who had seen her come out of the jail, indeed, hazarded a guess as to who she might be, and followed her up the street at a civil distance, pointing her out now and then to the curious.

"Michael," she said, "he has refused to see me."

"An' it's betther, honey; them sobbin' fits and argyments wid him will do him a dale more harm than good. I thought you had some words wid him yesterday, by the way ye looked, an' the silence ye kept toward me."

Eleanor did not speak again for many minutes, and her companion still waited that she might speak first.

"Michael," she said, in a horror-struck voice, "Michael, can it be true that I am not qualified to give evidence upon my husband's trial?"

"Ay, ay; so he's been tellin' you that, honey? Didn't I hint it to you all along?"

"But I was witness for him in London, Michael. He tells me a wife can not appear in criminal cases."

"That's the thruth; no good in life consaling it. That's the thruth; I wasn't up to it myself till the other day."

"Why did they not tell it me from the beginning?" she said, hurriedly.

"Shure you wouldn't let 'em tell you; ye faced 'em down, honey, and they knew ye'd find it out all in good time."

"Why did not Mr. Coleman tell me?"

"Twas hard to tell ye, 'twas hard to tell ye—it's a mortial cruel law. There, there, we'll talk of what's to be done when we get home."

They walked on quietly for a while—Michael afraid to break the silence, lest her agitation might rise to the surface; as yet it was strangely repressed. Soon they were clear of the streets, having arrived upon the fine airy road grown so familiar to Eleanor's eyes, with its country reaches showing through all the intervals of building. The day was cloudy, yet light, and the clouds spread their satin awning over the luminous hills. There was a wood in the middle ground, brave as a dying dolphin in hues, the rich August reds fading into purple and sad blue. There go a brace of wood-pigeons, flying away from the town like prisoners escaped, to hide in yon gay world of branches.

"I am very tired," said Eleanor, with a heavy sigh.

"Lean on me, honey; we ought to have got a cab, but it's not aisy to see one in these parts. Lean heavy on me; we're only a short step now."

"I can't go on," said poor Eleanor; "all my strength has left me."

"Shure we'll take a rest down here in yonder field; come wid me, honey, and I'll find you a nice spot to sit down. This comes of all your running about the world. I knew how it would be, just as it happened with my little maol cow. Now pick your steps here—that's it: here's a fine sod of grass for us."

He brought her through the gate into a large green field, and found her a seat of daisied turf under the fence.

"I can do no more," she muttered, leaning back.

"An' that's why you have broke down, dear."

"There is nothing left for me to hope, or think, or do. I must leave all to my merciful God."

Michael kept eying her very earnestly while she sat there feeble and despairing. He evidently had something in his thoughts, and was awaiting his opportunity.

"And if I could not be a witness, why did he use such a terrible threat *to me, Michael, that* if I should be the means of bringing his mother to—to sentence, he told me," she said, bursting into helpless tears, "he told me I should find myself a widow?"

"He was afraid ye might fly at the ould lady in her cell, and scold her into some slip of the tongue," said Michael. "All they says is taken down straight, to be sarved up on the thrial."

"Is it?" said Eleanor, starting; "then my evidence has been taken down. I made the whole statement to my husband from time to time in the hopes of making him speak."

"There again—there again. What they say may be used, but not a word you say," said Michael.

"Then he'll be lost"—she sunk back again—"he'll be lost before my very eyes."

"Before your very eyes, eh?" repeated Michael. "An' do you mane to go into the coort, honey, afther what you've heard?"

"What could I do there? How could I bear it to see my darling, who is as innocent as an angel, murdered by false witnesses before my very eyes? No one will believe me—why won't they believe me?"

Michael waited a while before he could speak, and he wiped his eyes gruffly with his coat-cuff.

"I believe you," he cried, with a voice like a gong, "begor, I believe you this moment just the same as if you wor a vision of the blessed Virgin. So you won't go into coort?"

"How could I?" she sobbed, helplessly.

"Listen, now. You've been following your own vagaries this while back, and would listen to nobody's advice but your own. Will you take advice of me now, honey?"

"There is nothing to be done—nothing to be done," she said.

"If any one said that but you I'd grip 'em by the throath. Will you or will you not be led by me?"

"What ought I to do?" she said, still crying helplessly.

"I'll tell ye: show that face of yours to the jury; it will plead more with them than all the evidence sworn to since the judges wore wigs."

"Oh, what folly!" she sobbed.

"Folly! an' call it so, but it's folly, my dear, that goes to the heart, whil

sense goes no farther than the head. Shure, I've been a juror myself on a thrial when a purty varmint of a woman wid her smellin' bottle, and her poor linen cheek, was plaintiff against a lord's son, whom she swore she had married, and she'd as much right to his hand and ring as a weasel has to a red cock when she's a suckin' his blood. Well, good jewel, there we wor all sheddin' tears, myself and the whole of us, at the looks she wore, an' the hankercher she sopped her purty eyes wid, ontil all of us were just no better than twelve boobies; an' it twarn't us alone, but the big black-muzzled judge on the bench was blubberin', and his big voice was cracked to a penny fife wid feelin', an' the whole bar was palpitatin' wid devotion to her, and mad as Crusaders to do somethin' or other for her. The crowd outside, my dear, wor sweatin' wid the fair dint of emotion, and crushin' one another to death, all through that purty pale face. As for the jury, we all forgot our oaths that day, and if we lost our sowls for it we must give her her verdict. Bedad, if we hadn't, the judge would have clapped us in the dock ourselves, as we calculated by his charge; or the mob would have torn us to pieces. Go into coort, darlint, and show 'em your face. You have truth on your side, which that varmint hadn't; the truth will be like a blessed glory round your purty head."

"But I am pale and worn," she said, beginning to catch his excitement.

"That's the very look that melted myself this minute. See what a grand moment it will be, honey, when your counsel has worked himself up into a storm, and his arms are flyin' about, and his chest is swellin' out, as if he drank a gallon of yeast, to bring down his fore finger of a suddent and point to you. Nothin' in life will stand that moment."

"No, no, I can not think that," she murmured, caught with this new point of view, never conceived by her before.

"That's it," faltered Michael, "that's it—that's the very look. I feel my ould heart breakin' for you, my purty, purty, *purty* darlint. There's not a jury could stand it, if they were all bred butchers. Go into coort wid that look on you, and *sit right forenenst them*, and give it to *'em under the ribs*, and I tell ye, ye'll *spile their dinners*; I tell ye, if they don't find your husband not guilty, they'll never know a night's rest again—never."

"I will be present, Michael," she said, rising. "Come, I can walk home now."

All the way home she was making up her mind to it—to this martyrdom of her modesty; she will trade upon this "purty pale face"—brazen it out with this trembling white cheek before the whole merciless stare of the court; yes, if it smote her blind like an Indian sun, she will brave it all for her darling. To me there is a touch of sublimity in the resolve.

There was another half-formed resolve which took shape that night before she went to bed. She must write a long, eloquent letter to the judge. Like all women, she had great faith in the effect of long letters, full of well-scored words. To his lordship's private perusal, then, she will submit her story, since the rigid forms of law exclude the truth from his public consideration. Driven to bay as she is, she will assail him in his privacy with six or eight earnest sheets of letter paper, on which she will stereotype the facts, and into which she will pour the overflowing of her heart and energy. She must take no advice about it, nor suffer herself to be discouraged, but, finding his lodgings by inquiry, she must drop in the letter herself.

To it she went, and began it with trembling consideration — with weighings, and balancings, and doubts; but once she had begun fairly, she did not lift pen from paper till she had filled eight sheets, lined and interlined, bristling with notes of admiration—ay, and blotted with tears.

CHAPTER XXII.

GRAY HAIR AND RUE.

"Trim with rue each snowy lock—
Rue that trims the felon's dock."

GRAY morning. It is the day on which the trial is to take place, which is expected to commence in the afternoon. Mrs. Kent is stirring, being mindful that she must appear before the world to-day, leaving these four still walls through which the sounds of the street could hardly pierce, and

where no eyes can visit her but those of the turnkey and his wife. To-day she will be set in presence of an immense assembly, to be watched and criticised curiously—she, a rustic, solitary old woman, taken from amid the fields. Her son will be placed beside her, and she bethought her that she must not disgrace him. Just as she was wont to dress out in her best, when in past happy days she drove into the crowded market town, so she must make her fitting toilet for this great occasion. She saw on the dim wall last night, as in a vision between sleeping and waking, what the scene which she must confront will be like. Hosts of vague staring faces all fixed upon her, all eager to see her condemned, hoping to see her die. She had taken a sort of stagnant resolution that she would never confess; let them try her, sentence her, destroy her, but she will be mute to the very end. Instinct and half-recognized motives were interwoven in this resolution. Largely engaged was a blind obstinacy, not uncharacteristic, though degraded; but there was another strong feeling in her mind. Public pity and sympathy cling round an unconfessing convict, and she had a dull prompting of this in her solitude. She knew she must be sentenced and die, but a silent death is a sort of mongrel martyrdom.

She was not hardened in the common sense, and could not be hypocritical. The morbid vanity of the felon was far from her; but to her instinctive perception, an aspect of mystery gave a dignity to her situation otherwise simply loathsome. If she confessed her deed and told its details in the face of some shocked parson or pitiless official, perhaps she might presently loathe herself. Now in her own eyes she is only a wretched old woman, withered and worn, who in the course of nature must soon die, but, like many worthy folk, she must die a violent death. Jane Tupper, her schoolfellow, was drowned forty-five years ago, carried away screaming to sea in her serge bathing-dress. She witnessed it; and that was not a much easier death than what awaits her. She was now doomed to die like poor Jane—that was all. But if she confessed her crime to herself and to the public, she would be a felon, hated, unpitied, slain first by hootings and then by the executioner.

This motive was remote in that she could not have told it or explained it; but it was powerful, and perhaps took birth during that violent scene with her son on that fatal night when he urged upon her that she should be secret forever, holding her arm with a grasp which still has left a bruise beneath her sleeve. It seemed to her that if she were led forth a confessed felon, Will might hate her among the rest. She determined never to confess, and all her native energy now tided into this degraded channel.

Will and she will take their trial together to-day; they will place him beside her all the time, and he will guide her what she must do, and she will watch him, so strong and calm in his innocency. They dare not insult his mother. As for him he is quite safe, being innocent—innocent as when she twirled the coral to him, and his baby lips assailed her breast. But it was granted her that he should now stand by her in the furnace which could not touch a hair of his head. She loved him with a dull, concentrated motherly love, and she loved him with a species of sluggish worship, as one who, in her own loveless, haggish debasement, would lend her both dignity and relief.

She had visits from her attorney, and listened to him with mechanical attention which served no end; but she gave her mind to other considerations. She thought much of her toilet on the morning of her trial. Some days ago she had obtained from Hill Side what dresses she desired, and she had specified to the messenger with accuracy in writing what she wished to wear, having turned over the question frequently in her solitude. Yet it was scarcely vanity alone which gave such trifles their prominence, for her selection was simple: that old dove-colored silk in which she met her son on his first arrival—this was the gown she proposed to wear on the occasion. And her cap—it must be her ample black lace cap trimmed with the heather sprigs. And her shawl—it must be the black Cashmere Will sent her from London eight years ago, first fruits of his earnings, when he was beginning to succeed. It was not merely vanity, all this care, but the

was a morbid activity of mind which sought relief in trifles during these days of unwonted idleness, and there was a wish that her appearance should not disgrace her son upon this great occasion—this terrible reception-day—this solemn thronged levée, when, like an aged queen, she should sit the centre of all eyes.

There was a draught from the barred window which came cool upon her cheek. This was the hour she used to be stirring about the farm in happy times. Are they draining the long field now? Are the lodge children pulling cowslips in the bishop's meadow? There is a sparrow chirping on the prison eaves. Eh, dear! how the linnets and larks used to spring before her when she stoutly walked her meadow lands, and how her gray hair, loosely braided, used to ripple and float in the early morning breezes, when the men were at their work before her, and creeping along the brown headland, sharp against the sky, went the horses and the plow! Why could they not let her die among those lonely hills and country breezes?

Bethink you, old lady, you may die among the breezes yet, your loose gray braids rippling and floating. But, instead of the brown headland and the plow, the provision shops and the gin shops may front you, with every window let out at fancy prices and crowded with holiday people, like the dress-boxes on the night of some Surrey-side triumph; instead of the meadow and the rustics at labor, a filthy arena below you, and the villainous glare of a city crowd; and beyond them all, far away, the pale piled clouds rising like the smoke from Tophet.

When such a mood seized her, she had resort to her Bible for support—there it lies near her on her bed—but it had only the effect of frightening her. Those passages alone which hint of a place of eternal punishment caught her attention. She had never thought very practically about religion: it was present in her rather as a superstition, so that it only visited her during morbid intervals. It must not, therefore, be understood that she was in any lengthened bondage to such a thought; it came like that well-known unaccountable shudder we feel at times—just a moment's cold wince, and it was over. Once at such a moment of intrusive reverie she muttered to herself, "Kent will be there—Kent will surely meet me there, if there's such a place at all."

She began her toilet with care, and brushed out her white hair, so rumpled by the night's tossing. She fixed her looking-glass toward the light, lest she might be scared by her face; indeed, for the last few days she had not ventured to look into it, such a terrible old hag glared out on her on the first day her looking-glass arrived.

Just as when, by some act, a man makes acquaintance with his heart for the first time after thirty or forty most respectable years of self-deception, and gets a moment's humbling shock. It was not age or wrinkles now that frightened her; but there had come an evil set in her foggy blue eye, and a fixed contortion on the wide blay cheek, which looked as if she had slept last night in hell. She muttered to herself at intervals, for some hours after, words to this effect:

"I love my son wi' all my heart, and I have lived all my life without a trick, and I have wished and done kindly to many. Lord a mercy! my soul don't look like that."

In the friendly shadow, she now composed her face before the glass, and brushed out her long white hair.

The bars were withdrawn outside, but it did not disturb her; she continued her state toilet; the door opened a little, and the turnkey's wife looked in.

"The governor wishes to know, ma'am, if you will see Mrs. Coleman?"

The old lady turned slowly, and laid down the brush.

"I was thinking of her just then," she said. "Let her come in."

She was, indeed, thinking of Eleanor's gentle hand and comforting voice when she placed those ill-omened orange-flowers on that lint-white head. That girlish woman's voice was then like a fountain of fresh spring-water to a parching throat. Perhaps now, too, by some fond juggle of voice, or words, or look, Eleanor may soften away the rigor from the future. Let her come in.

So Eleanor came in upon the poor old Sycorax, with her hair in this snowy dishevelment, her person in this untidy dishabille, her face soiled with misery

damps and sleeplessness. The female jailer followed Eleanor into the room, and seated herself near the door, so as to be inobtrusively present at the interview—an interview which took place at an irregular hour, and under the special indulgence of the governor.

Eleanor's conduct and whole demeanor on her entrance was singular and driftless. She came into the apartment with an uncertain step, and a scattered yet estranged expression. When she arrived at the centre of the floor she stood gazing at the old lady distractedly.

"Thank'ee for coming to see me," said Mrs. Kent. "You seem sorry for me, child."

"I am sorry, very sorry—but—I—" her sentence faltered away into silence.

"Have you seen Will?" asked Mrs. Kent, bluntly. "It's like you have a message from him to me."

"He has refused to see me, and so I am come to you," said Eleanor, riveting her eyes on the old woman. It was hard to define her gaze. Was it beseeching or distrustful, calculating or compassionate, or but a wild and wistful curiosity? The old lady chafed under it.

"Tut, child! I'll be stared at enough to-day, I expect. What see you in my face?"

Here Eleanor's conduct only grew the stranger; for, wheeling round, she went over to the woman who sat at the door, and said to her, "Would you kindly allow me a few moments' conversation with Mrs. Kent alone?"

The woman answered her with a look of surprise.

"It is quite against the rules, ma'am. I must be present while you are here."

"I can not speak before you," said Eleanor; "I have only a few words to say on a matter of life and death."

"I can't help that, ma'am; I must do my duty."

"Only five minutes," urged Eleanor; "I know the governor will excuse me."

"It's quite impossible, ma'am," said the woman; "you should know that as well as I."

"Maybe—oh, pray let me buy five minutes from you! I will give you a sovereign if you will stand out till then."

"*I'm surprised at you*, ma'am—such *an offer from a lady!*" said the woman, virtuously. "I'll be obliged to report this."

Eleanor turned from her and went over to the old lady, who had been watching them with a leaden indifferent eye, as she stood beside her bed. Eleanor held out her hand to her with tardy greeting, and Mrs. Kent took it at once.

"What makes you tremble, child?" she asked, as the soft young palm of her daughter-in-law lay shivering in her own.

"I am frightened to death about Willie."

"He's in no danger, dearie. Sit'ee down, sit'ee down. Will is sure to come off."

"Who can assure me of that but God Almighty?"

"Will is as safe as the child. Go to him, dearie, and he will set your mind at ease."

"But I say he has refused to see me," cried Eleanor, with an impatient sigh.

Mild or excited, still she kept on sighing and looking at the old lady, acting some hesitating part, as if she scarce knew herself what brought her here.

"Eh, bless'ee! Will and I have enough to think about on a day like this. A feeble tearful thing like you has no business wi' us to-day. How is your child?"

"He is well. The question I have to ask you only relates to my husband."

"Then you should have asked *him*, not me," said Mrs. Kent, sullenly turning away.

"You think I came here to betray you into admissions. I do not. My husband would never forgive it if any thing happened to you through me, and what he treasures I must treasure too. We all hope and trust you will be acquitted; but—" she added, in a hushed and awestruck tone, "*what should we do if Will was lost?*"

"I tell'ee, and I tell'ee again, that Will is safe," said the old lady, with a hard peevishness. "I expect there's none to pity my grief and danger."

"Willie thinks of nothing else," said Eleanor, in a hushed voice; "he thinks so exclusively of it that he neglects himself?"

"Was he talking much of me," said Mrs. Kent.

"He talks of nobody else."

"God bless him!" said the other.

"He was crying for you the other day, and I never saw him cry before."

"God bless him," said the old lady. "Mind'ee, Eleanor, any thing he said?"

"He said he would die with you," said Eleanor, all a tremble.

"God bless him! I mind the night he was born," cried the old mother, with a rending sob. "I mind when the throes took me at the dawn o' the morning; and I wish—ay, dearly—we'd both ha' died together that morning — mother and babe."

"Will is in great and awful danger," said Eleanor, closing up to her at the vantage moment: "he pretends to you there is none. I am his only witness, and I am not allowed to appear. Answer me this one question—is not your son's account of himself that night accurately true?"

The tears were yet on the old woman's cheek, when it grew wintry harsh again.

"You've a bold face to come here to me with such a lie. Will is safe, and I will fulfill his wishes, I tell'ee. I will answer no questions."

"Then," said Eleanor, in anguished retort, "you will be the cause of his death."

The old woman rose fiercely from the bedside to her feet.

"I seem to stan' betwixt two worlds this morning. Have you come here to insult me, and pry into my grief and shame? I will answer nothing till my death."

"I will ask you no more," said Eleanor, in meek despair. "Pardon me, I am wild with fright."

"Oh! you're sharp enough, wench—you're sharp enough."

She sat there speechless, and kept sighing still, and shifting her hands on her lap aimlessly. Presently she rose, and looked in the old woman's face once more.

"You'll get nothing out of me; I've nothing to tell," said Mrs. Kent, viewing her with harsh distrust.

"I want to hear nothing," said Eleanor. "I am sorry to see you looking so ill."

"It don't matter," said Mrs. Kent, in her stoutest key.

"Pray let me help you to dress before I go; I wish I could do more for you."

"You care nothing for me," said the old lady, half softened again.

"I love whatever Will loves," said Eleanor. "Pray sit down till I dress your hair."

Mrs. Kent yielded in silence, and once more Eleanor played the tirewoman on this second sad epoch, and she kept sighing still, and her cold hands trembled. She falteringly reminded the old lady, as she drew back the broad white braids, that she had dressed her hair for her before.

"I'd rather be as I am now than as I was then," muttered the old woman.

Eleanor placed the cap on her head once more, and tied the bow beneath her chin, and placed the shawl around her with trembling hands, as some poor slave might deck a bloody Indian queen, trembling for her head the while.

"Are you coming into court to-day?" said the old lady.

"Yes," said Eleanor, "though I can do nothing but suffer."

"You will teach that child to hate me."

Eleanor shook her head.

"Let it forget me; that will be sufficient. There's another young child I wish to do something for, if any thing is left me after all this wild work—a little toad I should hate; but I was dreaming hard of that poor wench's mother, and I seem to regret the beating I gave that poor meek wench more than—"

Eleanor grasped her shoulder, and stopped a fatal confession. The old woman stood that moment upon the brink of the precipice, and Eleanor saved her.

"I will mind your wishes," she said, shunning her companion's gaze, which had turned to her quickly. She hastily completed her kindly task, and abruptly bade her adieu.

"I must leave you now; I will pray God for you. Good-by."

She crossed hastily to the door—that strange feebleness and incompleteness in every word and gesture—and she went out sighing anxiously still. The visit was like that of a troubled sleep-walker, intent yet driftless.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It is midday, and old Michael leads Eleanor through the crowd to the court-house. He whispers a word here and there to the policemen, who pass them on officiously till they are within the court. Up the side passage they are still forwarded by virtue of that magical whisper, and both of them are provided with seats beside the prisoners' attorney.

Eleanor sent a scared look around.

There stood the two prisoners; there *he* was standing beside his mother, looking so anxious — a sort of look which gave his wife an aching sympathy. He was leaning forward a little and scanning the faces of the jury, apparently unconscious of her entrance, and tied to the post beside him were the green sprigs of rue. Low felons with the weight of guilt that anticipates doom have been stoics in his situation; yet here is a cool, strong-nerved Englishman, whose face is damp with apprehension; but it was not for himself.

The old lady stood beside him with a stolid bothered look, gazing before her vacantly. Her face wore the sternness of age, derived from mere harsh line and wrinkle, and meaning nothing more. Above her head, too, was tied the ominous sprig of rue.

"Look at the jury, honey. Now whip up the veil; they're a lookin' at you."

She put up her hand, and with an immolation of modesty, to me sublime, she drew up her veil and showed her face to the crowd.

"That's it. Bedad the foreman with the bald head there looks as if he were goin' to melt a lookin' at you. They're all a lookin' at you hard, honey; give 'em a good dose of your eyes to make 'em tindher. Don't mind looking at the ould babe-killing judge, honey; look at the jury."

But Eleanor's eyes are fastened on the judge's face, for it seems to her he has read her earnest letter, every sentence of which, so often conned by her, is graven on her mind. This very moment—heaven send it true!—that burning appeal at the close of her letter is in his thoughts, and he has felt the truth. *Why, God be praised, who helps the crushed and helpless!* there is the letter in his hands; she knows it well; and he begins to speak.

"I think it is right to state to this court," said his lordship, "that I received a letter yesterday evening"—how she caught at every word with parted lips!—"a letter yesterday evening which, were it not for the very painful and peculiar position of the writer, I should designate as highly improper. I have only to say that the moment I ascertained its nature, I closed it without reading farther."

Here was the first shock. She grew weak and sick, and her courage sunk at once. Michael was watching her.

"That's all right, honey; he's obliged to say he didn't read it; but I'd take my oath he ran his ould woman's eye down the page. Don't you believe but he did. Keep your looks on the foreman—him with the bald head and blue neck-tie—and put your white hankercher up to your eyes. That man's heart is as tindher as a sweetbread."

And now the prisoners were called upon to plead, and the usual formulary was put to them.

"How say you, Martha Kent, guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," said the stout old lady.

"How say you, William Coleman, guilty or not guilty?"

A silence. What is the meaning of this?

"How say you, William Coleman, guilty or not guilty?"

No answer. All the court is waiting, and yet he stands there leaning silently forward.

"Not guilty, my lord," rung out a woman's voice sharp over the gathering hum.

She had half risen from her seat, and on one side of her old Michael was pressing her back, on the other the old attorney was whispering remonstrances.

The judge, having learned who she was, looked down at her, full of courteous pity, and told her that he felt for her, but that she must endeavor to restrain her feelings. She might be quite confident her husband would be treated with perfect fairness on his trial, but that disturbance in the court could not be allowed, and would serve no end. He then ordered the usual plea of not guilty to be entered.

"Hut!" whispered old Michael, "there's no harm done; we all know he is striving to protect his mother. There now, you see," said the kind old liar, "the judge has just had your plea of not guilty entered for him—think of that, now. Keep your eye upon the jury; the counsel is goin' to open the case. Let him talk, and never mind a word he says; nothin' that isn't proved is regarded here."

The counsel for the Crown rose to address the court. Eleanor looked at him anxiously. She thought as she looked that his face seemed truthful, and had a merciful look. He seemed a gentleman. Her husband never injured or offended him; he will surely take a fair and humane view of every thing, and all will go well.

He began. She grew uneasy in a moment; her attention took a painful grasp upon his smooth flowing words. His pursy lips, his gaze beneath the brows, his manly chest and unhesitating gestures, seemed to stamp every word he uttered as fact. He took so fair and moderate a tone, too—the voice of humanity and duty—dealing with such a cruel question as the possibility of her husband's guilt. This frightened her most of all. A violent attack, or a scurrilous direct philippic, she had scarcely quailed under; but this specious moderation and compassionate phrase assumed in her eyes a tremendous significance, and seemed to command the convictions of the jury.

She was not prepared for such a plausible train of fact as he had forged from unconnected incident. He promised to prove this and to prove that; that he would point out the motive and lay his finger on the *animus*. He declared that he would bring witnesses to prove violence almost murderous. He would prove that the prisoner sat up that night and was seen coming out of the room. She began to lose her self-command. She would start, and her lips move at each doomful clause he uttered, till the friendly solicitor beside her, taking pity, touched her arm, and assured her these were mere formal statements. Terrible formality to this poor woman! and still he kept winding on so calmly as if his words were not *peine forte et dure* to her and death to her darling.

She grew craven lest hope might fail her before its time, and some shock might paralyze her prematurely, so that she should not have strength to go through to the end. He was carrying the jury with him, she thought. Will he soon have done—will he soon have done? Every sentence seemed a nail driven into her heart, and she became horribly enthralled. Will he never have done till all her hope has flown, and every chance is vanished for the life of her darling?

"It all means nothing, honey. Don't mind him; he's goin' on that way on every case he's employed on these last twenty years. Lord love you! it's to your face the jury are listening, not to him."

"So far, gentlemen of the jury, the case against the male prisoner is sustained by circumstantial evidence, yet circumstantial evidence of a very connected character, as will appear to you, and which carries with it very grave suspicion. But, gentlemen, I shall produce before you in that witness-box to-morrow evidence all but direct—evidence of a nature at once so guileless and unimpeachable that the law recognizes none so conclusive—evidence, gentlemen, of which, when once heard, it seems to me no reasonable man can entertain farther doubt."

"I want air, Michael; I want air. I am giddy—I am ill," gasped Eleanor.

"Take the poor lady out," whispered the attorney at her side.

There was a pause in the counsel's speech as she rose, and a murmur of sympathy became audible. Michael helped her to the door, and hastily led her out into the fresh air.

"What did he mean? What—was—saying—that evidence, Michael," she cried, breaking into nonsense with fright.

"Hut! don't believe him; that's a trick of his. They're always a goin' to say somethin' stronger than the last, and, when it comes, it's just like the little dog on the top of the lion and the unicorn, that makes all the fuss and looks ridiculous. Bedad, my dear, you have need to go to coort to learn what them chaps are like. The jury will listen to nothin' in life but the judge's charge. Shure I saw 'em winkin' and

smilin' at one another all through the speech."

"Did you?" she said, simply.

"Yes, faith; and one of them, the foreman—it was he wid the bald head and a sketch of a corporation—I saw him wipin' his eyes wid his red hankercher. Now you've made your appearance, and given them somethin' to remember, and we'll stay at home till *our* counsel begins to spake. That's the time to be happy. See how that chap will put the case: all that looks black to-day will look snow-white to-morrow. Wait till Wimbleton begins, my dear; that's the time. Come home and ate your chop like a lady."

"Are you in earnest? What was this new evidence, Michael?"

"How the divil do I know? Maybe 'twas your own, after all."

"My own! But that would clear my husband in a moment, and they will not admit it."

"Come home and ate your chop like a lady. Your husband's as safe to be acquitted as to-morrow's sun is to rise. There you are, staring at people as if they could help you, or as if they were thinking of us. Didn't I tell you, and got small thanks for it, that the witnesses the Crown dipinds on were bought over, and are on our side? Here's a hackney now, and I'll put you into it. I expect you'll have your husband home to tay to-morrow." Talking to her thus coaxingly, he handed her into a cab, and she was driven to her lodgings.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MICHAEL called to see her early in the evening, and he found her anxiously awaiting his arrival. She asked him what had taken place in court, and he assured her that all was well, and the counsel's speech safely over and forgotten.

"What's on now, pet?" he said; "you've the very wanderin' eyes of my little maol cow this moment. You're goin' to play me some trick—I know ye are."

"Michael, I'm going to call upon the queen's counsel myself who spoke to-day. Do not oppose me; I must see him."

"*Blood alive! how can ye see him?* He'd run a hundred miles from you. The paid servant of the Crown! Do you mane to brake my heart at last wid your pranks? Don't you know now that he's the paid servant of the Crown, and the man has his duties to perform?"

"I must see him," said Eleanor. "I must see him to-night."

"An', God bless us! what do you want with him?"

"I will make my true statement to him at all risks. Since I can not appear, I will at least disarm him against my husband."

"Well, now, do you hear her! Blood alive, do you hear her! And this is the style of conduct that has been goin' on this month. Well, when are you goin'?"

"I want you to find out for me, Michael, where he lives, and come back at once and tell me; I will then go with you."

"I know where his lodgings are very well, honey. Don't let that stand in your way. He comes to the same place reg'lar."

"Then we'll start at once."

"Oh, come along—come along; I'll give you your way. Nobody blames you, whatever you're driven to do, and least of all myself. Don't you take my smilin' ways wid you in bad part."

"I do not, Michael. I shall find time to thank you for all your kindness yet. But now I can think of nothing but Mr. Coleman's dreadful situation. I am ready to go."

They both started in the dusk, just as they were lighting the lamps. She preceded him by a few yards, with a rapid step, splashing through the puddles, and heedless who saw her, like a woe-begone woman as she was. Old Michael was at pains to keep up with her, and was somewhat sensitive for her sake at the undignified figure she presented, and he was anxious she should escape observation and remark. He shook his head at the draggled dress of his once dainty *protégée*, and cast a mournful gaze on the lock of disheveled hair down her back, and the bonnet strings flying in the breeze. Things were come to a pretty pass. Poor Misther Will on trial for his life, and his dear young mistress splashing down lane corners and through gutters, the staring-stock of all the town. When they reached the street for which they had been makin'

her step became more uncertain and slower. She glanced back at old Michael wistfully. What did she come here for, and what can she do here? He was moved by those piteous looks, and limped up to her side, having a smart touch of rheumatism, caught in his attendance upon her. But no sooner had he reached her than she was off again at a determined pace, and never drew breath till she was at No. 23.

"I'll go up stairs alone," she said quickly; "do you wait in the hall."

"I wouldn't say but it's best so, honey," he whispered. "Give him that look ye gave me, which convinced me the other day; but be wary wid the talk. Lay it on gently—gently. Now you may consider you're just going to coax the divil out of a sowl under his clutch. You'll not do it by wrastling; and I doubt you'll do it any other way, if that look don't do it. Bedad, ye melted me, and I'm purty tough."

"Hush! Wait for me in the hall. I'll not knock for a moment. Wait with me here."

"Shall I knock for you, honey?"

"Don't speak to me for a moment."

It was not indecision with her now. She was only putting up her prayer that she might prevail—that some strength more than she felt in her then might be given her — and that she might leave that door comforted. When she had finished, she lifted her gloveless hand and gave a little knock like a heart-flutter; it was so low that it was not heard, and the next was too loud and startled her. The pent eloquence in her breast began to choke the poor thing. How must she begin? how can she restrain herself not to rush in like a wild woman with an inarticulate torrent of entreaties? She must begin calmly, and state the simple facts with emphasis and clearness — facts which, if rightly stated, could not admit of doubt. This man she is about to see holds the convictions of the jury in the hollow of his hand.

A maid-servant opened the door, and her vulgar stare made Eleanor aware of the first difficulty which she must overcome—obtaining an admission.

"*What do you want, ma'am?*"

"*I want to see Mr. Corbait—is he not lodging here?*" she said, collecting herself.

"He's very busy, ma'am, and don't want to be disturbed. What name?"

"I'm the prisoner's wife—Mr. Coleman's wife," she said. "I want to see Mr. Corbait on business of life and death."

"Whisht!" put in Michael, "whisht! Do you want to spile your chance and get a sartin denial? Here, young woman, here is this lady's pass. You're a smart girl, and can make out a bit of a story in a good cause." He put a half crown in the woman's hand. "There, up stairs widout a word, and say it's done."

The maid bade them walk in and sit in the hall. She went slowly up stairs, and Eleanor heard her knock at the door above, and the careless inquiry from within—"Who's there?"

How careless it sounded, and she trembling with suspense and sick with misgiving! Michael saw her hands trembling, and thought she was sinking.

"Say the word, honey, and I'll go up wid you myself," he whispered, affectionately stroking her shoulder. "If you find the heart failing you at all at all, I'll come up and speak for you."

"No, no; wait here for me. Did you hear what the girl said? Will he let me up stairs?"

"Here, she's a comin' down, honey, and we'll hear all about it. She looks quite gay, as if she had managed it."

"Mr. Corbait says if you'd be pleased to walk up stairs, ma'am," said the girl. "I took the liberty of tellin' him a bit of a story as tempted him to see you. Follow me, ma'am, and I'll show you the way."

Eleanor rose in nervous haste. She heard Michael whispering something in encouragement, but she did not catch the drift. As she was following the woman she tripped upon the stairs in her flurry, and struck her forehead; but she rose without a sign of pain, and still went up, carrying a semblance of steadfastness in her face. The maid opened the door on the first landing, and announced—

"The young lady, sir."

In stumbled poor Eleanor, and confronted a large handsome man, with a quantity of curling black hair, whom she with difficulty recognized as the grave professional gentleman of the morning. Grave, said we? Mr. Cor-

bait's cheek was crisply smiling. He was an unmarried man, and of not ungallant repute. Whatever might have been his expectations, however, they met with a cold drench when he saw before him the piteous face and eager eyes of the prisoner's wife.

She stated who she was timidly, and made some broken apologies for her visit, but she came on a matter of life and death. "She had heard him speaking that morning," she said, "and she had heard him with very considerable pain. She was sure he could not have spoken so had he known the facts, and she was here to give them to him, having been an eye-witness."

"You're really mistaken in coming to me, madam. Had you not better lay them before your husband's counsel?"

"But it is you I fear," she cried, "and I would disarm you by telling you the truth. You've been so strangely misled, and you will mislead all the jury if you do not know the truth in time. My husband's hand is as free from blood as mine."

"You say he is innocent, madam. May I ask you why he refused to plead this morning?"

"Why did he refuse?" she cried, forgetting in her eager parry the incautiousness of her speech; "because he wants to sacrifice his own life for his mother's."

"Yes, yes," said the barrister, slowly; "but don't you see it's just as likely that you should wish to deceive us to save his life, as that he should wish to deceive us that he may save his mother's? You have come here, no doubt, with your account of the affair; but I beg to say, in anticipation, that my own mind is made up, and, however I may pity you, you can not deceive me, madam. Farther, you are aware, I suppose, that your statement can not be laid under the consideration of the jury?"

"How can I persuade you? Will you listen to the facts, and set the law aside for a moment? You, all of you, seem to me like blind men, denying that there is a sun in the sky. Do you believe me to be honest?"

"My dear madam, there are certain circumstances—that is to say, yours is a very painful, peculiar position. Honest I am sure you are, but—"

"Do you think I would perjure myself?"

"I will not say so, Mrs. Coleman. I only mean this—that if you perjured yourself to save your husband's life, the world would hold you excused, and I believe nine wives out of ten would do so. Moreover, my dear madam, that tenth might probably be a bad wife. You see, Mrs. Coleman, how the law is justified."

"I do not know the law, sir. It seems to me like a prison, shutting out life and truth. But I have heard that you give the prisoner the benefit of a doubt. You even receive the prisoner's own statement and give it weight."

"It is not given on oath," interposed the counsel.

"Let us say that the evidence of a Christian woman, given on her oath in favor of her husband, may be liable to suspicion—the utmost suspicion and doubt—and be only the weight of a feather in the scale. Still, why should he not have the benefit of a doubt? Why must his wife sit silent till her heart bursts, while servants and enemies swear his life away?"

"I can not change the law. The wife is supposed to be under the entire control of her husband. He is answerable for her. Her welfare and existence depend upon him, you see; and she is so utterly dependent and interested a party that there is the strongest presumption against her."

"But you can cross-examine—you can shake her testimony, and make her contradict herself if she is lying. Do you not admit an infamous approver, who is the basest of men, and is most selfish and interested of all? Yet you will not admit me."

He shrugged his shoulders and nodded his head despairingly—it was fruitless to argue with her.

"My dear madam, the law *is* so, and a change in law requires an act of Parliament, and a long time, and whole reams of writing and print. I suppose you do not come here hoping before the close of this trial that I can make an alteration in the statutes? It is a law, besides, that really has a humane and merciful intention. Now, suppose you were possessed of evidence against your husband—just the missing link that might be necessary to convict him, and

you loved him as you do now—would it not be a painful state of things if you could be dragged into the witness-box by a subpœna, and forced to give evidence which must convict him? But here is the law you complain of, which has been framed to shelter him and you from such an unnatural position; but even as it is, if you were exposed to five minutes' cross-examination, you might most fatally corroborate the charges against him."

"But this is not so. My case is not so. The judge and court do not know my peculiar case, for I was so confident up to a few days since, and every one kept me in the dark, that I took no steps to put it before them, and the judge would not even read my letter. I tell you I was the only person near him that night—the only one on the face of the earth who could see what he did, and hear what he said; and I have direct straightforward evidence to save his life, and cover him with sympathy and respect."

"But it is not admissible, Mrs. Coleman. Let us begin and end with that."

"You do not understand me," she gasped, in her haste. "I am so confused and terrified—you'll excuse me. I know I can not appear in court, but you should know the truth before you proceed. Now listen—oh pray listen! —and tell the court I sat by him—I held his hands. We were talking of his mother and of our departure next day."

So she went on reiterating her fond tale, like a white-cheeked Cassandra, whom no one would credit. How they heard the blow and the groans, and how they both rushed up, she holding his arm as tight as she held that chair—there could be no mistake—and how they both entered the room and saw the murdered man upon the bed.

"How can you convict him now?" she cried. "Oh, how can you lead the jury astray? There is evidence as clear and undoubted as daylight, and yet you are trying that man who—who could not see a sparrow killed—trying him for his life in a felon's dock."

"What can I do, madam?" said the barrister, shortly. The scene had become very painful, and he saw the hopelessness of convincing her.

"Could you not, for pity's sake, give up your brief in this barbarous case?"

"How could that avail? If I do not conduct it, why, it may only fall into abler and less sympathizing hands. Nothing can stop the trial."

She paused, and passed her hand over her forehead with a gesture of indecision.

"Deal mercifully and gently. Oh, sir, do not let the opportunity of success tempt you to blacken my husband's good name, and rend my heart"—her voice rose up plaintively here, as if about to break into a sob—"for I shall be there. I shall be hanging on every word you utter for one drop of mercy. You have a speech in your desk there—oh, for pity forget it! Put in some gentle doubting things. Say that it might be so, and that God alone can tell if this were true or that were false. Tell them they are only suspicions of people who saw nothing. Oh, tell them how terrible it would be if the prisoner were innocent, as he is!—as he is—yes, as innocent as his child. And surely you might say," she continued, letting her voice fall to persuasive murmurs, while her hands fluttered over the back of the chair, before which she would persist in standing, though he begged her to sit down, "surely you might tell them my account of it just as a supposable case—just because God and I witnessed it."

"No doubt your own counsel may suggest it, madam. It is really out of my province. Your account may be true, but, as I have repeatedly said, it can not be legally received or listened to. Pray remember that fact, and it will save us both a great deal of unnecessary pain. My duty is simply this: first to make a fair moderate statement of the evidence against the prisoner, as I hope I have done; and, secondly, to reply, as far as my own observation and sense of justice shall decide me, to the defense your counsel may set up. That is clearly my duty. I feel for you as every one must feel for you; but it is idle to say more. You are not in a position to comprehend my duty, and I can not farther explain it."

"What is this evidence against my husband's life?" said Eleanor, fitfully blazing up; "is it illegal that I should hear that?"

"Pray sit down and rest yourself, Mrs. Coleman. You are exhausted and

agitated. I am greatly pained; but you have been very foolishly counseled, my dear madam, in coming to me."

"What is this evidence against my husband's life?" she repeated.

"I am unwilling to pain you, Mrs. Coleman. Pray let me suggest to you to question your husband's counsel. He will clothe it in a more palatable form," said Mr. Corbait, with a sigh of distress. But she would not let him escape.

"I wish to hear it unvarnished by kindness and flattery. I want to hear it in its naked cruelty, as the jury have heard it from you, and will hear it again. I shall be quite silent while you tell me."

"I suppose I can not refuse you," he said, turning his eyes to the fire in genuine pain: he could not meet her gaze, it was so pitiful and eager.

"We have the prisoner's own silence," he began, "which, though in no respect evidence against him, has a prejudicial effect. We have the improbability of the explanation he gave; for, had there been robbers, the glass would have been broken from without, whereas it appears that no one but one belonging to the house could have broken the pane."

"Go on," said she, with an agitated smile.

"We have to take into account the strong interest your husband had in Kent's death—the testimony of the servants to the bad terms on which your husband lived with him, and to a violent assault he committed upon him."

"Go on," she repeated still, with a quivering smile.

"We have the evidence of all the servants to his having been seen coming out of the room in which the murder had been committed, and apparently within half an hour of the deed. These are the leading points which I enumerated this morning, and upon which the jury are to deliberate."

"You seem to me to be proving," said she, smiling, "that I do not stand here, and that the sun has not set. You seem to me to be proving that yon sounds are not carriage-wheels, and that the court did not sit this morning, and that—that—" she gulped, and the smile vanished—"that my God and Comforter is *hiding his face* from me in my—*my—my agony,*" she sobbed aloud, and burst out crying. "I am walled in," she sobbed—"walled in. Truth, and pity, and justice are out of my reach. You all conspire to wall me in—to bury alive the truth."

The barrister was completely melted. He spoke to her gently, and, afraid to hold out comfort, he offered her gentle and gentlemanly advice.

"My urgent advice to you is this," he said, "and it is dictated by deep and respectful sympathy. Keep out of court to-morrow, and stay with some kind lady friend. You may be confident of this—that in conducting this case I shall not transgress by a hair's breadth my strict line of duty, and by no needless word will injure your husband's chance, or hurt his feelings. And bear this in mind—he is sure to find every consideration and justice in an English court, and before a jury of his countrymen."

Commonplace, cold, and lifeless fell his advice upon her ear. She left him, rejecting his civility, and sick with an ungovernable apprehension and sorrow.

CHAPTER XXV.

She slept soundly that night. At first, indeed, her sleep was broken by starts, as she fancied she was still engaged in some vehement wrestle of mind. The counsel's voice seemed still opposing and refuting her, and she was answering, or striving to answer, for her tongue seemed under a sort of paralysis, and there was still a sense of wretched frustration upon her heart. Then came the soundest sleep, which lasted till the next morning was far advanced, and she woke at some weeping dream, which left no trace but the tears.

The cathedral clock struck ten when she woke, and she started up. The court must be already assembled; the second day had commenced which shall decide her husband's fate. She lost not a moment, but impatiently dressed to be on her way. She felt a strong inclination to go there alone, for she felt she had not spare energy left to oppose or attend to her old monitor. On this day of days she could think of nobody but one. She slipped gently down, and had just opened the hall door, when her landlady bustled forward to commun

cate something or to remonstrate. Eleanor neither looked at her nor answered her. She went out, and closed the door hurriedly after her, and found herself a desolate woman, hastening along the dreary misty road. The wet was mere drizzle, but it was more dismal than rain which has flash and motion in it.

The streets, as she passes through them, are strangely deserted. It is ten o'clock, and every body must be up—yet where are all the town? These streets might have been freshly hewn out of Herculaneum save for that battered old woman blinking out from the mouldy provision shop, and yon children moping by the gate. All the town have gone to gaze at the great show and sensation scene.

When Eleanor came within sight of the court-house, the air was alive with a human hum. The street was densely packed with the mob: black and white, scarlet, green, and yellow—the pie-colored mob. Here they are, waiting for what she waited for—thinking of what she was thinking of—looking forward, in suspense, for the same result; but with this simple difference, theirs was pleasure, hers was agony. She tried to penetrate them to the door. She might as well hope to climb yon sheer wall like a fly.

She walked round the skirts of the concourse, searching for an opening, till she came to a policeman who was addressing a gentleman and two ladies—a gay party who had come with a pass from some notability to go in and witness the tragedy. The policeman recognized the authority, and made lightsome way for them, and the living passage closed up in a second against Eleanor. Her name is not on the roll of actors within, and she has no spectator's pass. She hurries round the outskirts still, and is in time to be present at another little scene. Here are a gentleman and lady in full wrangle with another policeman, the lady quite as peremptory as the gentleman. She must get in—there was plenty of room—she knew the judge personally.

"I can not let in any more, ma'am. The court has been full this hour. We *have our orders.*"

It was in vain the lady protested; *but her energy* was not without some *reward. Eleanor* touched the policeman's sleeve. Turning to her, he recognized her at once, and addressed her as Mrs. Coleman.

The lady and gentleman caught at the name. Up went the gentleman's eye-glass, and the lady's neck craned forward. They had not come for nothing. Really the prisoner's wife was almost as great a curiosity upon this day as the prisoner himself. They will have something to talk about at the dinner-party to-day, when this inquisitive lady's bosom is bare, and she is delicately attired in muslin. She has seen the prisoner's wife in a very pretty agony—saw her lean over her shoulder as she struggled through the crowd quite like a Cenci—"we must really obtain a photograph of her, if one is to be had."

Unconscious of her celebrity, Eleanor was passed in by the policeman, who, as did Michael upon the preceding day, whispered something to the man at the door; he again whispered something to a man inside the court, and she was still passed on till she arrived once more at the circle of attorneys, when a seat was made for her by the friendly old lawyer she knew, who met her with some whispered remonstrances which she did not heed, for her whole attention was absorbed by the prisoner in the dock. There he stood, leaning forward slightly, and the same fixed disquietude upon his features, as if he had been standing there ever since. Beside him sat the old lady, staring into vacancy, regardless of time, and deaf apparently to the proceedings.

The cook was up in the witness-box. She gave her evidence most mellifluously. Every statement she had made at the inquest was since then beautifully oiled, and the poison extracted from it. She remembered the night of the murder. She was lying awake that night, because she expected Mr. Kent in, and thought there would be some words between Mr. Bryan and Mr. Kent. Heard Mr. Kent come in. Mr. Bryan was snoring fast asleep in the next room to her. Heard Mr. Kent come down talking to some one. Thought at the time it might have been to Mr. Coleman's little boy. Mr. Kent was tipsy. Heard Mrs. Kent come in to him in the kitchen. Knew it was she by her voice, but did not hear what she said. Could hear Mr.

Coleman and his wife talking in the room above her at that time. Did not say so at the inquest. Had not six pair of ears—had only two—they were long enough for her own purposes, and their length was nothing to counsel.

In fact, the cook's natural friend and protector, the counsel for the Crown, who hitherto had quite reflected her own mellifluousness, had, as may be conjectured by the foregoing rut in her smooth evidence—turned upon her in a twinkling, and metaphorically slapped her in the face. Their little conversation had hitherto been on the most friendly terms. Nothing could be more so; when, all in the middle of this perfect understanding, Mr. Corbait, I repeat, had turned right round on her and become unkind, not to say insulting.

In continuation, the cook deposed that she heard Kent go up stairs, and about half an hour after thought she heard Mrs. Kent following. Would not swear it was she. Mr. Coleman's voice and his lady's were quite plain talking above her. Could not hear what they were saying. How could she through a ceiling and floor? Did not tell this at the inquest, because she was so frightened that day she did not think of it till after. Often remembered things of a sudden that way, which she had scarcely noticed at the time. Heard Mrs. Coleman screaming up stairs. This was five minutes after Mrs. Kent went up to her bedroom. Could not swear Mrs. Kent went up any farther than the top of the kitchen stairs. Didn't know whether the length of her purse affected the length of her memory. The idea! Of course she had received money—she had received her wages. Was she to live on charity? Wasn't counsel paid himself? She had asked Mrs. Coleman, of course, for some compensation for the injury done a respectable woman like her being mixed up in such a shocking business. Mrs. Coleman had refused her. There—was he satisfied now?

She remembered an occasion when there was a quarrel between Mrs. Kent and deceased. Of late they were always quarreling. They used to fight about the money he was spending — often heard them; and about a young girl in the house. *Don't know* any thing about *the latter business.* Didn't use to attend to such things — always kept the girl at a distance. Heard Mrs. Kent often say deceased was spending her money. Mr. Coleman was always a peacemaker—often heard him making peace. Said so, or to that effect, at the inquest. Is sure she said he had been very civil to deceased. Is not in the habit of listening at doors — wouldn't do such a thing. On the occasion of the great quarrel she had related between Mrs. Kent and deceased, Mr. Coleman interfered quite gentlemanly. It was quite gentlemanly to knock a man down when he deserved it. Was not telling lies. Don't know whether Mr. Kent deserved it. Many a man besides poor Mr. Kent deserved it.

Here cook was called to order for her irrelevancy, and the examination proceeded with a strong protest from the prisoner's counsel, many times reiterated during the above, that the Crown was cross-examining its own witness.

The cook did not see Mr. Coleman strike a blow, but saw Mr. Kent on the ground. Don't know who hit who. Something must have knocked Mr. Kent down. He was a little tipsy — quite enough to make him unsteady on his legs. Remembered *that* also since. Never said she saw Mr. Coleman strike him; that would have been a lie if she did. She was telling the truth — was quite incapable of telling a lie. Remembered a hatchet very well. Did not see it for some days. Heard from Simon—eh, well! bless him, if he didn't want to know what she had heard, she had no object in informing him. Would swear she hadn't seen that hatchet or any other hatchet, said the ruffled cook. The scullery wasn't her place—she had no business there. Her room was next to Mr. Bryan's; it was directly under the sitting-room where the prisoner and Mrs. Coleman was sitting. Don't know whose money it was as paid her wages. Who paid counsel for his impudence? It was as good money as any body else's, and it was her due—that's all she thought of.

Went up stairs when she heard Mrs. Coleman screaming without putting on her gown. Saw Mr. Coleman come out of the room as mild as a lamb. He had nothing in his hand. He locked the door, and said to the boy, "Bless you good lad, go instantly for the police

Seemed quite anxious to catch the murderer.

Now, to complete the anomaly of this investigation, when cook's natural enemy, the prisoner's counsel, rose, instead of hurting her very susceptible feelings, or injuring her unimpeachable character, he soothed her down all again, and made her quite happy—helping her out—enabling her to magnify her own honesty and her Christian feelings toward Mrs. Coleman, who had been so inconsiderate toward her. After giving Mr. Coleman a very excellent character, the cook went down quite mellifluous and oily again.

The old attorney patted Eleanor's hand. "There, now," he whispered, "there, now, see how well that 'went off; nothing very bad yet, you see. Now, my dear lady, do—do go out of court. Be advised by a friend." But Eleanor never heeded him: she began to hope.

Old Abraham was up. Remembered the night very well. He was awake, because he thought there would be a fight between Mr. Kent and Mr. Bryan. Sleeps away from the kitchen, and is a little deaf. But heard Mr. Kent talking a deal in the kitchen and then going quietly up stairs. Heard Mr. Bryan snoring in his room, and his mind grew easy. Heard Mrs. Coleman crying up stairs, and on going up saw Mr. Coleman come out of the room. He had nothing in his hand. He sent Peter for the police immediately. Don't remember seeing the hatchet below for many a day. It was used for chopping firewood. Remembered driving Mrs. Kent into town two days before. She told him all her money was gone. She was very violent going into town, but seemed ill and silent coming out.

This witness was very stupid and simple, and spoke very broad patois. He was not cross-examined.

"There, now, there, now," whispered the kind old attorney still; "all well so far. Let me entreat you, my dear madam, to leave the court now. I will call upon you myself and bring you the news."

Eleanor did not hear him or heed him: she had begun to hope.

Simon the groom was next called up, and, after being sworn, he said he had something to tell his lordship about this 'ere mysterious business which he had seen on the day before the murder. He had not minded it much at the time, but he was fretting ever since with the weight of it upon his mind. Having received permission to speak, he stated, amid the hushed court, that on the morning of the murder he had been sent out by Mr. Coleman to catch the colt, and he was just crossing the fence at the foot of the hill, with a halter in his hand, when he saw two chaps a lyin' in the fence. One of them had a smock on and a wideawake, the other a kersey coat and a red hankercher round his head. He asked them what they did there, and they said, "What is't to thee? Go on wi' thee, fool." While Simon was telling his narrative the counsel for the Crown was standing in silence, watching for a chink in the witness's complete suit of brass. Simon did not seem seriously pulled down by the weight upon his conscience. He looked dissipated indeed, but bluff and bold as a little bandy-legged bulldog.

Mr. Corbait was not, of course, zealous beyond his mere public duty to destroy the prisoner's chances. He had himself, perhaps, a thorough conviction of the prisoner's guilt, and he made a shrewd guess that agents of the prisoner had been tampering with the witnesses. He very properly, therefore, put Simon's account into the crucible, and inquired feelingly how long Simon had been fretting under the weight of this communication, when he recollected it first, and so forth.

Simon was equal to the occasion. He recollected it the day he was leaving Hill Side, a week after the murder. He was reminded by crossing the very same fence with the very same halter in his hand to catch the colt. He looked in the fence expecting to see some one, but it was empty, and the whole thing came back to him. He thought nothing of it at the time, because people often came in to cut branches for firing and to steal the gorse. He never told it to a soul till he could tell it to his lordship in open court. That was truth, on the virtue of his oath.

Simon also deposed to a mythical tinker, whom he swore to have seen in the scullery a fortnight before. Ever since then the witness missed the hatchet. He paid the tinker himself, having

received the money from Mrs. Kent. Would know that 'ere tinker again if he met him; he was a pock-marked little man as had lost a thumb.

As to the existence of this tinker, Simon was corroborated by the kitchen wench, who, it turned out, expected to be made Simon's wife at his earliest convenience.

Michael was next placed in the witness-box. He happened to be called as a witness by both the Crown and the defense. Michael then gave his evidence with much stolidity and caution, and with some feeling too. He seemed a thoroughly honest witness, and the Crown dealt with him as such, permitting him to amplify his replies, which were all strongly favorable to the male prisoner.

He remembered the night of the murder. He had been sitting up for some nights with an ash stick by him, which he intended for Mr. Kent's back. Mr. Coleman had been reasoning with him, and striving to take the stick from him. Mr. Coleman told him he had received money from London, and was going to take his mother and wife away with him, and to give up the house and land to Kent for peace sake. Michael knew Mr. Coleman since a boy, so he could speak plainly and confidentially to him. Mr. Coleman told him that night, as a warning against his using his ash stick, that he (the prisoner) had once been led to strike Kent when he insulted his mother, and all the harm that came of it.

He was awakened on the night of the murder by Mr. Kent's voice in the kitchen, talking to his little daughter. The child was witness's own grandchild. Here Michael was about to enter at large into his own private wrongs to the jury, but he was cut short. He was ill that night, or maybe it isn't Mr. Coleman had been standing in that dock, but himself. He was awakened by the cook and maid screaming below, and he heard Mrs. Coleman screaming above. He went up at once, partly dressed, and he saw Mr. Coleman coming out of the room with nothing in his hand. As witness was coming up stairs he met the old lady coming down. Said nothing to her, and she said nothing to him. She seemed to have just come out of her room, or to have been put out.

Under a mild cross-examination, Michael gave Mr. Coleman an enthusiastic character as a good and soft-hearted man, with honor and honesty enough to supply all the attorneys in coort, "and leave himself enough to go to heaven with."

This last gratuitous insinuation of Michael's against a body of gentlemen I personally revere, it is needless to say, was pointless and absurd.

Verily Michael seemed about to address the jury himself in the defense, from his elevated seat, and would certainly have done so in effect had he not been summarily sent down.

"Now, Mrs. Coleman," whispered the importunate old attorney, "now, my dear madam, be content. There—all well so far. You really must not stay here any longer. Quickly now, there's a good lady. I will see you to the door myself."

Eleanor was elate and trembling with high hope—she would not stir.

Something is going to happen of unusual interest. There is a murmuring among the crowd, then a silence, and all faces seemed turned toward a certain point.

"Call John Meer Coleman."

"John Meer Coleman!" The crier took up the note, and there was the usual movement in the crowded passage as some one was invisibly passed along to the front. A maid came first, and when she arrived at the witness-box she turned and lifted up a little figure into it. What have we here?

Amid the hush of the whole courthouse a poor little wistful child stands there, neatly combed and cared for, and in a pretty gay walking-dress—God forgive them!—worked by the poor mother's hand. The shrinking child stood there, altogether fascinated by the scarlet robes of the judge and his terrible wig. His lordship looked at it with studied indulgence—so pretty, so bright, and innocent it was—a baby terror in each round eye. There was a murmur of sympathy throughout the crowd, and all held their breath as one man. There were fathers there who felt an uncomfortable thrill, and unwittingly shook their heads as they looked at that pretty yellow-haired infant, and bethought them of the loved little folk at home. What if one of them stood

down yonder in the dock? if young May or bright-eyed Mat were there in the witness-box against them?

There was a universal vigil on all the crowd for one imminent moment. When will the eyes of the mother and child meet? Rumor has got about that she has not seen it for more than a month, and never dreamt she should meet it thus. Will she scream or faint, or struggle over toward it? At present she is sitting there with a petrified gaze of surprise and incredulity. Who brought her child here? Who dared to bring it here? Have they trained the little fawn to snare its father to death? the being he gave life to brought here to swear his life away! What evidence can his child bring against innocence and truth?

"What is your name, dear?" said the counsel, quietly.

The child's eyes were fixed on the scarlet robes of the judge, who repeated the question soothingly.

"John Meer Coleman," faltered the child, in a tiny voice.

It was caught up by counsel, and repeated to the jury in a tender volume of tone, and the judge repeated it caressingly.

"How old are you, John?"

"Seven years old," faltered the child.

"Now, Johnnie, where would you go if you told a lie?"

"To hell," said the child; and the proof of its capacity as a witness was complete, because of its legend-like knowledge of heaven and hell.

The book was given to the child to kiss, and, having been instructed what to do, never taking its eyes off the judge, it imprinted a timid kiss on the cover—not such a kiss as it used to give its father in the happy days.

"Now speak out like a good child, and look at these kind gentlemen before you. Do you remember the night poor Mr. Kent was killed?"

The fascinated child winced, as if about to cry, and could not withdraw its gaze from the awful red robes. The judge repeated to it the question.

"I do, sir," came the response.

"Did you see poor Mr. Kent that *night?*"

"*I did, sir.*"

"*How did you know,* Johnnie, that *he was killed?*"

"There was a cut on his forehead," murmured the child, beginning to cry, his waxen hands fidgeting in his belt, and his gaze still upon the judge.

The reply was repeated aloud to the jury, and the examination went on.

"You had been asleep, Johnnie, and covered up in your cot, had you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"What awoke you, Johnnie?"

"Mamma was crying outside the door."

"Was any one besides Mr. Kent in the room when you awoke?"

How softly the counsel lowed out his question—how kindly the judge cooed it after him! What a grand unearthly silence is in the place where a hundred hearts are beating! There is a fatal disclosure now—a mortal secret trembling on those young parted lips. One harsh sound now, and it may fly away forever. Hush! The moment is unnatural and inhuman. What is the mother doing now? She has worked round, in sight of them all, till she is right opposite the child. There she stands, fierce as a panther, staring him down with a hard unmotherly glare.

"Was there any one beside Mr. Kent in the room when you awoke?"

"I saw papa."

There ran a shocked murmur through the crowd, popularly called a sensation, and then a freezing silence again.

"Had your papa any thing in his hand?" came the velvet question: the judge cooed it out, entrapping the child on as it faltered and sobbed. It hangs on a hair if the child will speak. Should its gaze once catch the mother's starting eye, not four yards from it, it will be struck dumb.

"Speak the truth, Johnnie," came a low voice from the dock — a low voice — a home voice. The child's eyes fell upon its father's face.

"Speak the truth, Johnnie; don't be afraid."

"He had a hatchet," said the child, and in another second his eyes, by some strange attraction, were dropped upon the mother's face. The child quivered as if it had been suddenly stung, and wailed aloud.

"Oh, mamma! mamma!"

"My lord," said the counsel, amid the buzzing court, "it is very painful, but

really if we would arrive at the truth the mother must be removed."

Yes, they may remove her now; the worst has been done, and all is over with her. She was passed along through them to the door without opposition, and tottered out alone. Her shoulders are heaving with hysteric sobs as she leans against the pillar, encircled with a greasy sympathy, the villainous pity of the mob, which is shared by the pick-pocket and the felon. The same dirty crowd which stare at her, and tell her story with rancid pathos, will not the less throng before the scaffold on which her darling stands.

A strong pair of shoulders worked through the crowd toward her. Here comes old Michael, to shield and support her as well as he can. He gave her his arm and led her hastily away.

"Bedad," he muttered to himself, as he hurried her on, "bilin' a kid in its mother's milk is nothing at all to this. Come home, my poor darlint."

CHAPTER XXVI.

MICHAEL placed the poor wife on a chair in her room, and she sat there in passions of tears. Not the less was her anguish because the fountains of grief were unsealed, though the poets make such stock of your stony grief. It is a pretty superstition, no doubt; but in my experience of at least one stricken woman's heart I have seen many a burst of tears as unrefreshing as lava, and the heart broken all the same.

It had been better, perhaps, if Michael had said nothing, since he could not give hope; but the old fellow had not much *finesse*, and must fain be talking. His words passed her idly by. She did not know what he said as he reminded her there was time to see her husband often — that he was well prepared to die, and so forth. Michael seemed to feel at length the utter vanity of talk, and sat watching her in all the humility of helpless compassion.

"Michael," she said, between her sobs, "go back into court and see the end. And—if—if—there is hope, come to me and give me some sign. Quickly go."

He got up, not debating it with her, and *went to the door* with great zeal; *but she stopped him.*

"Take care how you tell me! I must not let myself sink yet. If there is no hope, just come back and say nothing; I shall know sufficient then; but if there is a chance, stay away. Or—wait, Michael: then it would kill me to see you walking up the street," she said, talking convulsively. "Go quickly; I leave it all to you. I can not bear much now, I am so broken and prostrated, and I must have my strength to be with him to the last. Give me some merciful sign, Michael; don't delay now, but I shall watch for you. Oh, Michael, bring me back some gleam of hope!"

He left her to watch for his return, as one watches for the crisis of a deadly fever, fearing to inquire or to think. She dried her tears and drew over to the window to watch for him.

Mrs. Porter met Michael in the hall, and delayed him there a while. She told him there was something wrong with the poor lady up stairs—that she could not hold out much longer in the state she was in if she were not minded. It was not those crying fits she was afraid of in the daytime, but the poor lady showed very queer symptoms at night, which frightened worthy Mrs. Porter. She had heard her start out of her sleep with a scream, and heard her keep muttering in her sleep in a way quite awful to hear. On one occasion, when she went in about twelve o'clock, just before returning to her own bed, she found the poor lady quite in a dead faint, or, as the doctor called it, "sincuppy." Her hands and feet were quite cold, and it was not till Mrs. Porter had lifted her, and rubbed her head with hartshorn, that she showed signs of life, and the blood returned to her face.

"I got a little bottle of camphor julep for her, and she's been taking it every day; but there is something wrong with her; she can't talk to me without her face all twittering like. You ought to have a doctor to see her, Mr. Bryan, for I'm very uneasy at night. I've had a lady who owed me three weeks' rent, and, bless you, she was found dead in her bed in the morning."

Michael bade her call in a doctor by all means.

"Call in the best doctor in the town, Mrs. Porter, for her life is very precious to us all. Watch her well till I com

back. I wouldn't leave her now but that I know I am leaving the poor lamb in the hands of a friend. Bring her up a glass of wine, Mrs. Porter, dear, and don't talk much to her to-day, for her burden is so heavy, you can't lay a finger on it, or breathe on it, but it may break her down. And maybe you could get her some little sleepin' potion toward evening that will tide her over the bad news."

Mrs. Porter concurred with his advice, and when she had closed the hall door after him, went up and spoke kindly to her lodger, who was sitting at the window. She pressed some refreshment upon her; but Eleanor, disregarding her offer, sought anxiously for her opinion if there were not some chance —what did she think? what had she heard? Eleanor would have asked the same question of a beggar in the street that day: she was snatching at floating straws.

Worthy Mrs. Porter did not like her state. She went down stairs in quite a motherly state of heart, for there is scarcely a heart so business hard that it must not have bled for the poor wife watching at the window. She put on her bonnet, and went round the corner of the street, and fetched a doctor, to whom she detailed all the symptoms she had been observing. The medical man addressed Eleanor with much professional kindness, and spoke a little conventional good cheer about the trial, his opinion having been urgently asked. He told Mrs. Porter the lady was suffering from overstrained nerves, and that a few nights' sleep would probably set her right again. He wrote a prescription, which, being translated, meant some twenty drops of laudanum in a wine-glass of water at bedtime each night; and he recommended that she should be got to bed early, so as to have her settled asleep before the more feverish hours of the night. There was no apprehension, and he would soon see her again. He then departed cheerfully; and Mrs. Porter, going to the apothecary's and showing the prescription, obtained a small bottle of laudanum, which she brought home and placed upon the chimney-piece in her own room, beside the bottle of camphor julep.

Thus, during Eleanor's agony of suspense, these worthy and very sublunary folk were quietly prescribing camphor julep for her below, and measuring her sea of troubles with a tape. Suppose she sleep to-night, is it not but one tide-wave passed? What shall calm the next and the next? Not your opiums and anodynes can cure such a grief as this—unless, indeed, an overdose.

Now Eleanor *was* ill. She was made of more delicate ware than a heroine of romance, whose constitution is wrought steel. Her nerves were yielding to the strain. As she sat there at the window to watch for the foot of him who might bring her good news, which might strike her dead with joy, or bad news, which must kill her by inches, you would have said she looked able for no farther effort, but must sink whatever came. People passed by the window thinking on their own affairs, but in her imagination full of the one thought which filled her pulses, and she strove to read their insensate faces for news. And still she strained her eyes for a glimpse of Michael coming up the road with the death-warrant on his face.

Michael, meanwhile, arrived by another way, and, coming up stairs quietly, looked in on her with head and shoulders.

"Well, honey," he said.

She rose quickly.

"Michael, don't—wait—what is it?"

She looked in his face piercingly: it was very sad, and the stroke of his sad look fell silently on her heart. She sat down quietly again.

"I have brought you the sign," he said, "and the comfort too, darlint."

He opened the door and came in, leading her little son, holiday dressed, by the hand.

She looked at her child glassily. She would have fed that child, pelican-like, from her heart's blood. If her frail body could have shielded him from mortal peril, she would have thrust in between with dauntless love. But he was safe, and those pretty lips had slain one dearest of all—the one whom she worshiped next to her God. In this hour the greater love quenched the lesser.

"Take him away, Michael; why do you bring him here? Take him away, I say! I will not kiss him or look at him."

The child began to cry.

"Mamma, mamma—pray don't."

"For shame," said Michael; "don't visit it on the poor innocent child, whom you taught yourself to speak the truth. Take him to you: it's the comfort God has sent you."

The child was stretching his arms round her, crying aloud, and striving to turn round her averted face.

"Truth!" she muttered, catching at the word; "truth is not for this world. No one believes it, even were it to come from the lips of God."

"Look round at the poor little cratur. How can you hear him crying to you?"

"Not now, Michael; I can not look at him or speak to him now. They have trained him to swear away his father's life. Take him away."

"Mamma, I couldn't help it. Dear mamma, don't be angry. Turn your head—ah! turn your head, mamma—ah! turn your head."

"Johnnie, go away with Michael. I will try to forgive you. You have done what never, never can be undone. Michael, take him away from me," she murmured.

"For shame!" cried Michael still; "you will say things to that child he will never forget. Turn to him now and cuddle him. God has sent him to you. How dare you be angry with the babe, whom God Almighty doesn't blame?"

"Ah, mamma—ah, mamma!" wailed the child, hanging on her—"ah, mamma! turn your face."

She turned her face at last, and met the young burning kisses with a cold, stern cheek.

"Johnnie," she said, lest she might wrong his future happiness, "I will not blame you, but at present you must return to your aunt. I am sure you are very sorry for your papa. I am so sorry myself that—" sobbing and turning away again—"that I can not speak to you just now. Be a good boy, and pray for papa. There"—violently sobbing—"take him away, Michael; I can bear this no longer."

Michael lifted away the child that strove to cling to her. He had painfully to unfasten each little knotted hand before he could carry it away.

Alone again, she leant over her forehead against the wall with that stunned patience of the sheep just sunk under the mortal blow, and every minute there came a rending sob. The child's crying voice came down to her unceasingly, and it troubled her at last. She spoke out wildly to the empty room.

"Bring down the poor fatherless child to me." There was no answer. "Bring down poor little Johnnie." No answer. So she suddenly lifted her head, and she rose. She took some steps across the room toward the bell-rope—midway she fell like a stone.

Michael and Mrs. Porter heard the fall, and came running in in alarm. There she lay on her face upon the carpet, her languid hands outspread like one in the last abasement of despairing prayer. They lifted her to her bed and applied restoratives, bathing her forehead with ether, and opening the casement above and below; but she lay like one dead. The doctor came and felt her pulse. It was a little faint life-thread that seemed every moment about to cease. But she was still alive—she was in trance.

Eleanor lay in that trance all the day—lay on her back dead-alive as if sculptured from the bed. That singular cataleptic state which is rare, yet sometimes follows as a reaction upon distraught nerves, had locked her poor restless limbs in a frost. Very still was the poor wild heart now—very restful those weary limbs that have borne her hither and thither, running to and fro for hope and precious life. She was not altogether unconscious. Thoughts came slowly bubbling up through the black gulf, as from half-drowned life below.

She heard Michael's voice as it were afar, and the hard provincial voice of the landlady afar off; but grief, and passion, and emotion were mere stucco casts, their contortions fixed and motionless within. It was like the suspended moment of transition from time to eternity. In this mysterious state she lay all that night, with the candle-gleams upon her face, just as it falls upon the shrouded dead; and the day-dawn coming through the window traced out her lovely blanched face with a phosphorescent touch, and the silver sunshine fell upon her like a nimbus. If she could save her husband's life now by walking across the room, he must die without a chance. If all the judges in Great Britain were to give her a spec

hearing, and Will's life depended upon her Cassandra tale, he must die without mercy. That well-conned tale so apt to her lips now lies like an icicle upon her tongue, stilled perhaps forever. All the next day she lay in that trance as if she would hold it till doomsday, when her husband might awake her, himself arisen.

CHAPTER XXVII.

After Eleanor had left the court on the second trial day there was not much more interest. The evidence was generally considered conclusive against Coleman, and slight against his mother, and it was felt the jury had made up their minds. The prisoner had grown calm and attentive. His anxiety had gone, and his mother still looked vacantly before her, having resigned herself to suffer, and well assured that she alone was liable. During the evidence of the child, indeed, her attention was aroused, and she whispered an anxious inquiry to her son. "What was going on now? Why was that child brought here?" But he quieted her easily.

"It is all right, mother; Johnnie is telling what he saw. It is nothing—nothing. Keep up heart."

She was content and trusted his words, being dead to every thing but the conviction of her guilt, and a stolid submission to certain doom. In fact, she gave no weight to any evidence which seemed to reflect upon her son, knowing well it was not he. Arguments or assumptions she could not enter into. She looked straightforward at the fact as it was, and, having but one anticipation, she made no provision in her mind as to any other event.

The evidence of his little son had not come upon Coleman entirely by surprise, but it was only within two days of the [illegible] it became known to him that the [illegible] had a story to tell extracted from [illegible]y his new maid. Whether this [illegible]old against his mother or himself [illegible]t him in the utmost suspense.

[illegible]s counsel tinkered up his case with [illegible] the solder he could apply, and the [illegible]ry amount of twaddling pathos [illegible] course introduced, with a good deal of genuine feeling too. Artistically considered, the wife made a good point in his speech, and she was served up duly. The wife of the prisoner's bosom—her noble devotion and horrible ineffable desolation — and many such epithets, were freely thrown out. He inveighed, and I think with reason, against the law which excluded the wife's evidence in the prisoner's favor, and wound up his speech with a proper fine climax, one introduced by him frequently before, and since then plagiarized by a rising friend of mine with great effect.

"Gentlemen," he cried, in hoarse conclusion, "I have now done. If I were to rely upon my language or my arguments—upon the earnest thought and sleepless care I have lavished upon this cause — which I do not hesitate to designate the cause of innocence—I should sit down with a dependence upon your sense and judgment to complete what I have left imperfect — to give force to what I have feebly handled; and I should sit down in good hope. But, gentlemen, I rely upon what *I feel* and *have felt*, not upon what I have spoken. I rely upon the conviction of the prisoner's innocence, which is strong within my breast" (here he thwacked his breast); "and strong in that feeling and that conviction, I sit down secure of your verdict."

Then came the speech of the counsel for the prosecution, and then the judge charged the jury, and his charge was felt to be against the male prisoner. He spoke in high disapproval of the conduct of newspaper editors, and bade the jury dismiss all they might have read or heard from their minds, etc.; and then the jury retired, and after a consultation of about half an hour they reappeared. The prisoners were again placed at the bar: the names were called over, and their verdict was demanded and announced without creating any surprise.

"Martha Kent, Not guilty."

The old woman started. She suddenly lost her self-possession, and reeled aside into the arms of the turnkey. Hitherto her settled despair had acted as ballast to her mind, and steadied it by its weight. Now that it was suddenly withdrawn she tottered and lost her head.

"William Coleman, Guilty."

He stood quite calm, just turning to see his mother removed within, and then he faced the judge with an untroubled

front. The rest was according to established form. He said nothing, but respectfully underwent his sentence, and was removed from the dock by the turnkeys.

He was immediately placed in the condemned cell, and from henceforth applied himself as men of his type usually do to wean himself off the world, and by religious exercises to prepare for death. He seemed to shrink from inquiring about his wife, and yet it was evident each morning he expected her, and looked to hear that she was at the gate. When the usual hour had come and passed at which she used to be admitted, he would question the turnkey whether any one had been inquiring for him, and he still seemed sorely pained for some moments after when he heard that no one had been there.

At first, the relief he obtained from the knowledge of his mother's escape gave him sufficient support; but presently his own situation took its due prominence, and, truth to tell, he contemplated it with loathing and revolt. His feelings and state of mind could scarcely have been guessed from his demeanor. In the morning papers he was reported as healthy, cheerful, and calm, and so they will probably report him to the end. Fortitude is a conquest over the surface, and Coleman had more than ordinary self-command; but he had more than felons have to bear. The guilty man feels dissociated from all once dear to him by his deed. His place can know him no more. His fate is in keeping with his crime, and on a level with his ruined self-respect. But Coleman, an innocent man, what was he losing? Happiness in a home and a wife, whom he loved with a love that worldlings would laugh to hear defined, but which some of us, my friends, if we were not ashamed of what is good in our nature, could testify to to-day. The pretty young wife is lost to him, so winsome and beloved, who could weave happiness and content round him—who was all the world to him. Her name must never be named with his again; his memory will be like a ban. He was in the prime of life, and had much to lose. He mourned over it in secret.

Then this terrible death of infamy sickened him. In anticipation he used sometimes to shudder as he lay awake realizing it in the night under the watchful eyes of the jailer. He had dreams of it.

Where is Eleanor now—that bonny soother? How would she address herself to soothe this grisly terror, which in the end he must meet manfully and alone. Still in the mornings he hoped she would come, and he arranged in his own mind how much of his trouble he dare show her, and how much he must conceal, lest he lean too heavily upon her.

The prison chaplain, an excellent, sincere man, made his appearance, and endeavored to impress upon Coleman a full sense of the awfulness of his situation, of which, indeed, the prisoner was becomingly conscious. Coleman listened to him attentively, and, as the papers duly reported, seemed to display a growing resignation; but when the clergyman pressed upon him the duty of a full confession, he quietly said he was an innocent man. Of course his ghostly monitor, being accustomed to such assertions, received the avowal with cool discredit, and again and again returned importunately to the duty of a frank admission of guilt. Coleman was quite patient and courteous with him. He made no emphatic protestations, but only repeated his quiet assertion—"I am an innocent man."

One day the parson came to him and opened the subject very solemnly.

"Mr. Coleman," said he, "I have brought you very heavy news, sir, and I do not tell it to you to increase your trouble, but in the hope that it may move you to give the only proof of repentance now in your power, by making a full confession. Your poor wife is very ill."

"Is she in danger?" said Coleman, quietly.

"Very great, Mr. Coleman. She is under an awful and singular insensibility, and it is doubtful if she will ever arise from her bed. And now, my dear brother—"

"You have given me, sir," interrupted Coleman, still quietly, "the only gleam of comfort I have received since I entered these walls."

"My dear sir, the announcement should bring your mind, if you love your poor wife, into a very serious frame. You should reflect that these judgmen

thicken over the head of a sinner who hardens himself against the Almighty."

Coleman's eyes were vacantly fixed upon the prison grate. He seemed dreamy and inattentive just now.

"You are moved, my dear Mr. Coleman; I see you are deeply moved, and I do trust that your added sorrow has worked upon you profitably. Oh, let me entreat you, by your love to your wife—by your eternal hope of pardon, my dear brother, not to make barren the good work of prayer we have commenced together by this obstinacy! Your wife may yet be spared and raised again from her sick-bed," said the parson, "if you do not tempt the judgments of heaven by this obduracy."

"I was thinking, sir," said Coleman, with a smile of deep dreamy pleasure, "I was just thinking how strange and sweet it will be, if, on the morning when I stand in public to die a shameful death, Nellie and I chanced to unmoor from the world together."

"My dear sir—my dear Mr. Coleman, there may be a gulf between you fixed."

"If we chanced to unmoor for heaven together," repeated Coleman, leaning back against the wall and looking up at the daylight.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Old Mrs. Kent was liberated immediately upon her acquittal, and she met with a perfect ovation outside the prison walls. In fact, she was hailed with acclamations as she came forth.

Some queen, some conqueror, comes this way. The people cheer her, and make room for her, and cover her with hearty congratulations. As for her, she passed through them like a bothered old owl dazzled in the sunshine. She seemed not to know where to turn, and as if unable to distinguish their applause from hootings. She appeared to be looking about her, up the street and [illegible] the street, for some corner wherei[illegible]ide from them. At length a po[illegible] took pity on her, and inquired [illegible] where she wished to go. He [illegible] a cab for her, and put her into it; [illegible] stooping in toward her with the [illegible]-handle in his hand, he demanded [illegible] *would be* driven to Hill Side.

[illegible] *not to Hill Side*, bless the man! *What should I do there?*"

The policeman closed the door on her, and gave the cabman the direction of Eleanor's lodgings, which he happened to know—as indeed did most in the town by this time—and thither the old lady was driven. At the door of Mrs. Porter's house she was set down, and Michael received her on the step with a mighty bass-toned welcome.

"Here's the ould misthress safe from her troubles, Mrs. Porter. Here's a rale honest ould lady cleared before the whole country of every suspicion. Shure my evidence seemed to go agin you, alanna," he whispered, as he led her in, "when I said I saw you comin' down stairs; but I knew you wor innocent, and it could do you no harm."

He led her in, and told Mrs. Porter to get ready the best and most commodious room in the house, whispering that she might charge "any thing in raison, and maybe she might have her distinguished lodgers for a quarter." Mrs. Porter had by this time resigned herself to the notoriety thrust upon her house, especially when she had ascertained that her lodgers were not implicated: the pleasing prospect of realizing a whole year's rent for her landlord in three months now entirely reconciled her to her lot. Moreover, she considered that now a responsible relative of Eleanor's was arrived, she would be relieved from her trying attendance upon the patient in her unnatural state, and the old lady might now take the place of nurse to Eleanor. In this fond hope she was soon undeceived. Under the first stimulus, however, she made ready her own bedroom for Mrs. Kent, the best furnished and largest in the house. There, over the chimney-piece, was the portrait of her husband, painted, as it were, with a red brick and washing blue. On the chimney-piece were delf Arcadians blowing pipes and a-Maying together. There were medicine-bottles also, those which she fetched for Eleanor's use, and those she kept for private coddling. Especially obvious was a bottle of peppermint drops, to which Mrs. Porter had frequent resort in any little distress arising from indigestion at supper. There was a luxurious arm-chair in the room in which she dozed, and a fine feather-bed with two downy pillows on which she slept, and some favorite geraniums upon a rude

stand at the window, which prevented the shutters from closing.

This haunt of comfort, then, she resigned for lucre, and herself retired to a little bedchamber above, in which she accommodated herself to circumstances.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The old woman could not rest still. She wandered from her room with a motiveless solicitude. Sometimes she was found standing in the passage—sometimes she made her way into the landlady's little retreat, speechless and stupefied, yet with some sort of craving for company; and there she might sit a while, moving her lips now and again, but deaf to questions. Sometimes she said she would be off to Hill Side, to find some use for this sudden awful liberty of hers, that lay waste before her. What was she to do with it? It bewildered her. This cumbrous liberty, which she had foregone forever on the day she surrendered herself to justice—it burdened her with a sleepless responsibility. It was like the captaincy of a helmless wreck, with no living soul but her on board. What's to be done—what's to be done, or said, or seen the endless day?

She went up twenty times a morning and evening to Eleanor's room to look at her, and had probably scarcely a motive for the act. There was no love or curiosity—no very human feeling at all—but a certain blind impulse to do it, because she was free to do it, and knew nothing else she had to do.

She had been passive in the hands of others hitherto, and did not need to take thought for herself. All was to have been done for her, and she played no part herself in the drama but to sit still or be led about without moving hand or tongue. She was drifting to the Falls, and the motion was drowsy and swift. Scream or struggle were vain torture, therefore she might sleep and be passive. Now she must think for herself and act—one act or effort of thought is not enough to fill the endless day and troubled night—fifty acts will not fill it—and she was one whose nature was practical, and to whom activity *was life. A* vacillating dotage *seemed to govern all her* movements.

She met her grandchild once before he was taken back to his aunt's, and she took little notice of him, putting him away from her with her hand, and passing him by indifferently. He was nothing to her now. But that awful rapt sleep of Eleanor's, which terrified the whole house, attracted her continually, and drew her up stairs with some loadstone power. The house was hushed, just as if death was in it, and those constant purposeless visits were notable to all. On the third morning the trance was still upon Eleanor, and up came her sinister visitor to look on her. Old Michael was standing ruefully at the foot of the bed, and Mrs. Kent took her stand a few yards from its side, pryingly examining the senseless figure, her old face set heavily forward.

"It might be better for the poor lamb if she never woke from that awful sleep, ma'am," said Michael; "she'll hardly stand the news we'll have to tell her."

Mrs. Kent seemed too engrossed to answer him. She went over and laid her sinewy hand upon Eleanor's cheek. No; it could not blench, and it never shrank at the touch of that guilty hand.

"It's as well for poor Misther Will as herself," continued Michael. "He'll want all his courage and strength to die like a man. Them sobbing matches wid this poor lamb would shake him terrible just now."

"Where is my son?" said the old lady, turning to him.

Michael returned her gaze, and from her his eyes wandered again to the upturned face on the bed.

"Whisht! she might hear us," he said, pointing solemnly to the latter. "How do we know but she hears and ponders on every thing we are saying, only she can't cry out?"

She can not indeed cry out. A cry arising now from that passionless face had seemed to these two gazers like a cry from the dead.

Michael went over to the old lady and led her from the room down stairs to her own. There he told her, with some little merciful preamble, the news which he had supposed a few minutes before she must have known. She received it at first with leaden incredulity; and when at length, by patient explanation and by the evidence of the new

papers, he had convinced her, she seemed beyond any strong emotion. What she felt was stolid—she took the intelligence into her mind to brood on it—and after some ten minutes' silence she cried, in the strong, trenchant accent of her country, "It don't matter, Michael, whether one be crushed wi' a ton o' clay or wi' a woal grass hill on one's breast. It canno be worse. It canno be worse. We are all ruined—man, woman, and child."

"Well! you're safe, ma'am, at laste. They can never try you again."

"What, never? Eh, dear! never try me again? Look'ee now: if that man came to 'em from the dead, wi' the bloody dint on his forehead, and told 'em all it was I that struck that blow, think'ee they would not arrest me again?"

"Not they, ma'am, not they. Once you've stood your trial, ye might walk the streets night and day wid your confession round your neck on a printed boord, and they couldn't touch ye by the law of England. But this is quare talk, ma'am, when you're as innocent as the child. If Kent came back to us as a witness, I'll be bound he'd speak the truth, if he never spoke truth before."

"Look'ee, Michael: if I went back straight to prison now, and knocked at the gate this morning within an hour, and bade them take me in again—that I am not fit to live—and told 'em to free my poor son, for it was I committed that crime—think'ee, man, they would put me in the dock again, and free my poor Will?"

"Begor! that reminds me of my poor pet up stairs," said Michael. "She was ready to swear at any blessed minute to any thing on the face of the earth. Myself believed her stories at times, she was so fiery wid 'em. She was ready to confess she did it herself, if she could only save the poor masther."

The old lady meanwhile put on her shawl and bonnet, and went hastily to the door.

"Where are ye goin', ma'am?"

"Abroad."

"Where abroad, ma'am? Pardon me," said he, interrupting her progress *respectfully*, "I've had enough of that *poor lady's vagaries* up stairs, and I'd *trouble ye to tell* me where you're *goin'*."

"Abroad, man. It's naught to thee."

"We must not have you runnin' wild about the town, like that poor lady inside," said Michael. "See what it has come to with her. We don't want two of ye stretched, above and below, as if ye wor waitin' for your coffins."

"I am going to give myself up, man, for this murder. Who are you, to stand between me an' the law?"

"I tell ye, ma'am, not all the mothers and wives in the land could change that jury's verdict, and wash it out wid their tears. What's done is done. You can not be tried again. They'd push you back from the gates, and the mob of roughs that cheered ye on Monday might tear ye to pieces to-day. Nothing can save Misther Will. No doubt he counted up the cost of the vingeance he took on that ruffian Kent. Sure we must all die, and God chooses the road for us, not ourselves. Rest aisy in your own room for to-day; and if the darlint cratur up stairs recovers, I'll take ye both quietly back to Hill Side till such time as it is fitting to bid Misther Will good-by. Sit down there, now, like a good lady, by the fire, and wait till the ache begins to lave you. Ould people like us—I speak wid respect—don't feel so keen as that poor darlint up stairs. Sorrow won't lodge on branchless ould trunks like you and me; it's the green young tree that catches the snow."

This and much more he said to her, standing between her and the door. Her once stubborn will was now as a reed in the wind. She yielded to his arguments, and sat herself down by the fire for an hour or so, when her fidgets returned: she strayed about the house again, troubling every one, and fascinated to Eleanor's room, where she was lying dumb and white, not to be questioned, but who could say unconscious of her grim visitor's presence?

At length, as the evening came apace, Michael and Mrs. Porter, with united influence, induced her to return to her own room once more, and obtained her promise that she would go to bed early. About ten o'clock Mrs. Porter looked in to see if she were likely to keep it and settle down quietly for the night. She found Mrs. Kent lying on her bed, covered by a dressing-gown and cloak, apparently fast asleep. She retired quite satisfied; but about midnight, when

the household were asleep—but Eleanor the soundest of them all—Mrs. Kent rose in the dark and went quietly over to the door. She opened it, and stood listening. She stole out and went up the first flight, as if on her accustomed visit to Eleanor's room; but on the dark lobby she changed her mind and returned. She lit the candle at the fire, which was still red, and placed it upon the chimney-piece; then she stood there upon the rug, and again seemed to listen. Her eyes were fixed on some object upon the mantel-piece. It was an object not noticed for the first time. She had been thinking of it these many hours, in the daylight and the darkness, while wandering about or lying upon her bed. It had been a sort of focus round which her scattered mind had begun to gather. It was, in fact, the little bottle which worthy Mrs. Porter had left there among others, and had been intended for Eleanor's use. Her name was on the label, and the directions for the dose—so many drops per night: in printed capitals were the warning words, "Laudanum—poison."

"Will is gone," said the old woman, softly, "and his young wife is gone, but they spare me, and I am upward of sixty-three—I shall be sixty-four in three days. Bless us, how I've been living—how I have been living . . . . Eleanor looked right calm and settled up stairs. She has nowt to trouble her, and her day is laid out for her, from cockcrow to supper-bell. At her age I was a right froward hearty wench. Let me see! I'll sit me down—I'll sit me down and think on't."

She took the bottle in her hand, and, drawing over the arm-chair to the fire, she sat down and thought on it a while.

"Nellie had a white pillow under her head," said the old lady, speaking up as if some one were by. "Eh, dear! it looked so calm."

She rose, and, going to her bed, she took the pillow and laid it against the back of the chair, shifting its position a little, and smoothing it till it lay seemly and fair, and then she took her seat again.

"On next Thursday morn I'll be sixty-four, if I live to see it—I'm only sixty-three to-night. . . . . Nobody 'ill ever know I *did it*. I have confessed *it to nobody*. The people 'ill be sorry for me . . . . and they'll put only sixty-three on my coffin."

She uncorked the bottle quickly. There was no hesitation about her, and there was no appropriate soliloquy, such as had been dramatically fitting. This stout old lady was no female Cato in the close of her career. Her life was redolent of the field and the turnip, and the upland grass, and the ruminating kine. Her language was acts. While others talked, she did; and let it be said that, till ruin and ingratitude crushed her nature into contortion, and turned its kindly and lusty juices to sourness, she did well and meant well to all.

Her parting thoughts, to be sure, as she holds her death in her hand, are somewhat grotesque and wandering. Never mind that. If you knew the links which join them, they are sufficiently to the point. No doubt pied vanity—who is no respecter of situations, and who would, I believe, prattle her impertinence before the judgment-seat of God—no doubt pied vanity perched beside the old lady as she stood upon the dark border-land. Never mind that; the sprite has stood beside great queens before now, at the same solemn moment, like a quaint crazy jester with a sting in his gibes.

See how dignified is the action. She lays her weary white head back upon the pillow. There it rests, the face turned up just as the lovely young face up stairs is turned up. Putting the little bottle to her lips, she drinks off her quietus, and drops the phial on the carpet. Now we are gone—now no more responsibility what we shall do, or where we shall wander, or what we shall speak. Drift, drift away. That awful liberty is delivered up, its charter is torn across, and thrown from us forever. We have nothing to do but wait and drift, drift away.

Who comes to disturb us? There is a hasty step outside, and the door bursts open, and in comes the shrouded Eleanor, staggering over to the old woman's side. So at the sounding of the last trump may the beloved dead burst into our rooms, and cry aloud to us to awaken—the dead calling to the dying.

"Mrs. Kent, Mrs. Kent, awake! My husband will suffer. You must save him—you must confess to-night."

Mrs. Kent looked up at her. "What want 'ee?" she asked, plaintively. "I thought you was gone before us, dearie."

"Mrs. Kent! God has almost raised me from the dead to save my husband's life. You committed the crime for which he is going to suffer; I charge you with it. I saw you with the hatchet in your hands. You must confess to-night, or you will have murdered your own son. I tell you I have heard them saying up stairs he will die in two days, and I've been striving to rise and speak since morning. Who is guilty, Will or you?"

"What need is there to confess? You know I am guilty," said the old woman, heavily.

"You did it—you say you did it?" Eleanor rung the bell violently, leaning against the wall for support, and the people came hurrying up stairs and down stairs to her peremptory cries and the loud ringing of the bell.

"She says she did it!" exclaimed Eleanor, pointing at the old woman. "Mrs. Kent! Mrs. Kent! tell them all now, and save your son."

The old lady roused herself from a growing lethargy. Michael stood at one side, and the landlady in her bedgown at the other, and the servants gathered in front.

The old lady roused herself, and looked from face to face slowly.

"Good people," she said, "I don't see you plain. I only see faces, but I care not who ye be. I committed this crime, for which my son Will is about to suffer."

"Listen!" said Eleanor, who had sunk into a chair—"listen! How did it happen? Tell them how it happened."

"I trusted Kent," muttered the old lady, with a confused sense of self-vindication, "and I was blind and fond. He robbed me of all my money—he shamed me before my own child—he insulted me as no wife, I think, was ever insulted before. That is all past, and I want to sleep."

"But you have not confessed all to them. Waken! waken!" cried Eleanor. "Michael, rouse her; shake her; she must not sleep now till you all know the truth."

Michael propped the old lady up, con*vinced that she, too,* was falling into a *trance from agitation.* He shook her and raised her head. She looked at them all solemnly again, and seemed to make an effort.

"I took the hatchet," she muttered, "and I went up and struck him in the forehead, like Sisera, for what he had done to me."

"Get writing—get paper; write it down—write it down," gasped poor Eleanor. "Remember, it is not I who am telling this. Remember, this is not my evidence now. Mrs. Kent! Mrs. Kent!" she cried, "where were my husband and I when you struck him up stairs?"

"You and Will were in the parlor. I heard ye talking as I passed the door."

"There—there. Get paper, for heaven's sake! Thank God! Get paper and pen. It is not I who speak now. This is not my evidence: you heard her. Will and I were below as she passed up. Mrs. Kent, how was it Will came to have the hatchet in his hand?"

"I must sleep," muttered the old woman.

"Waken! waken!" cried Eleanor, throwing herself upon the slumberer, "waken, Mrs. Kent! How did Will come to have the hatchet in his hand?"

Mrs. Kent woke up.

"I thought this moment," she muttered, "I was before the throne o' God."

"You are in God's presence with me this night, Mrs. Kent. Tell these people, how did Will get the hatchet in his hand?"

Mrs. Kent tried to sit up, but she could not.

"As I am a dying sinner, without hope o' mercy, Will came in and twisted the hatchet out of my hand, and put me out of the door. Lay my head down now—I must sleep."

"There," cried Eleanor, sinking to her seat. "You all heard her; and our child woke up at my cries. That is all the truth. He is saved!"

Michael almost lifted her away out of the room, telling her he would have every word written down, but that if she were not quiet her fit might return.

"I might never wake the next time, Michael. Write down all you have heard, and let them all put their signatures to it, and get Mrs. Kent's signature. Do you hear? Then, if I never waken, my husband will still be saved?"

He brought her to her room and made

her lie down; then he wrote down every word Mrs. Kent had spoken, and read it out to her content. He immediately got the signatures of all who had been present. None of them had left the room in which the confession had been made. They were all surrounding Mrs. Kent's chair still as he put the pen in their hands. Just then Mrs. Porter had a small empty bottle in her hand, and was examining it with evident alarm.

They then saw how it was with her; and even while they were recovering from their consternation, and considering what ought to be done, the old gray head sunk back and back from their supporting arms and rested on the pillow: it seemed to sleep there as soundly and sublimely as ever a saint slept in the catacombs.

CHAPTER XXX.

Then came that voice, when, all forsaken,
My soul long had sleeping lain;
Nor thought its cold pulse could ever waken
To such benign, blessed sounds again.

Sweet voice of comfort! 'twas like the stealing
Of summer wind through some wreathed shell:
Each inmost winding, each secret feeling
Of all my soul echoed to its spell.

'Twas whispered balm, 'twas sunshine spoken:
I'd live long ages of grief and pain
To have my long sleep of sorrow broken
By such benign, blessed sounds again.

MOORE.

THE intelligence reached Coleman of his wife's recovery, and it scarcely brought him joy. He must leave her behind. But with it came the awful news, told to him mercifully, of his mother's suicide.

It was a time with him when he must have earnestly striven to shut out the world from his thoughts—a time when those who talked to him addressed him as a dying man, and as one whose ties with all earthly concerns might be considered dissevered—so it was thought well not to agitate his thoughts, or to stir the stagnation of nature so favorable to repentance and so auspicious to a confession of crime. Up to the arrival, then, of this news, his mind had been crystallizing into resignation, and his nerves had been gathering hardihood from their familiarization with certain fate. But the last blow broke him down. He received the tidings with such unrestrained agitation that he shocked the good chaplain who brought them. Indeed, the prisoner was so violent, abrupt, and indecorous in his grief, that Mr. ———, after many vain efforts to calm him, was obliged to leave the cell, and in subsequent visits to avoid the subject, though some of the incoherences of the prisoner rested on his mind—when he exclaimed, for instance, that his sacrifice and ruin were all made vain by this. When he muttered that this was a judgment on him, and that all he loved were undone, he seemed to the good chaplain to be raving; while, on the other hand, Coleman, as if ashamed of his display at the first shock, withdrew himself into a languid unsettled abstraction, enlivened by no glimmer of impatience.

His firmness became undermined from day to day till it was a mere outward semblance and shell, skin-deep, all hollow and dark within; but still he struggled with himself. "She is gone from a life of shame," he said. "People would have shunned her, as they now shun her poor remains; but she shall meet no insult henceforth. Neither she nor I shall feel our shame. I shall not trouble for it when I am buried under the prison flag." But these words were empty hardihood to deceive himself; he was obliged to mutter them aloud, for he could not think the poor cold vaunt.

"Suppose I were to awaken," he muttered feebly—"to awaken from this state, which seems to me too horrible to be true, and find myself far away in the country with my wife and child." This phantom of comfort was all he could conjure up to himself now. He had been in the habit of saying to the chaplain that nothing but religion could sustain him. What was, then, the amount of its support? Well, he had been a steady, church-going man, who had never doubted its truths—not reasoning of them either so deeply or so shallowly as to doubt—and we must all feel that, without God's intuition and vital presence in the heart from day to day and year to year, that frail plant, faith, must languish. These patched-up repentances in the desperate eleventh hour will not do. Such spasmodic faith will not support the foot: it is like one night's fro on the lake, which seems solid f

bank to bank till we step upon it and sink through. Now that in his horror Coleman partook of the blessed bread and wine to comfort him, hoping for strength from these great pledges of remembrance, they loosened not the anticipated grip of the hangman upon his neck — they offered no substantial indemnification to his impious self-sacrifice—their import was nothing to the poor dead mother he dared not hope to meet; and the promises uttered above them could not lift the eternal curse from her soul. He was fain to find some other resource, and found none except the dogged manhood of physical nerve.

"I feel certain," he wrote in a sort of feverish diary which he kept, "I feel certain that I shall be self-possessed, and walk steadily on Monday morning; but to-day, to-night, and to-morrow! Oh! these days, these days! They have in them the bitterness and sting of death. There is a sewerage of misery flowing through my mind, and a longing begins to grow upon me that wars against my God. Wolf Tone's death was in my thoughts all the morning. He knew how to escape from stone walls."

"God help and comfort my poor heroic darling! I believe my greatest torture is to love her too much. I feel as if half the pain would leave me if I could deaden that love. This misery comes by fits, I observe. In the evening I expect to feel it less, and to-morrow God may comfort me with a higher love and hope. So reasons my pencil, but my heart has no philosophy in it now."

Saturday passed over; and Sunday, with its approaching convict service, dawned upon Coleman, who had tossed sleeplessly all night. What he had suffered during these night-hours, brooding over the piteous forfeiture he had doomed himself to—over the blackened name he had bequeathed to wife and [illegible] —over the infamous doom which [illegible]ed him when those shuddering [illegible]s his hand rested upon must be [illegible] up to the last revolting offices of [illegible] and dishonor! What he suffered [illegible] not be curiously dissected here. [illegible] convict's Sabbath dawned through [illegible]nt teem of rain, and Coleman, half [illegible]sed as he lay, sat up on the side of his bed and made a request of the turnkey. He said he wished to see the chaplain immediately.

Now, although it was the unreasonable hour of five o'clock, when innocent men sleep most soundly, the turnkey pricked his ears at the request. He said to himself that the prisoner was just about to confess, and must by no means be balked. He knew something of a convict's nature. They were apt to be impulsive, and their moods were likely to shift and fall again if not taken in the tide. So he immediately communicated with a turnkey on duty without, who tarried not till he had borne the message to the chaplain's house, and had it sent up to his bedside. To the awakening ears of Mr. ——— the message took this shape.

"Please, sir, to get up and go to the jail. The prisoner Coleman wants to see you immediately. He is going to make a confession."

Up started the good man, and lost not a moment. He took paper and pen with him, stepped across to the jail, and was ushered into the prisoner's cell on a waft of charity and ghostly solicitude.

"Mr. ———, I am very grateful for your coming to me."

"I am grateful for your sending for me," avouched the flustered chaplain; "I have desired such a summons very earnestly, and I am most thankful to learn that you are about to confess your crime."

"I am going to confess my childishness," said Coleman, smiling coldly. "I am like a frightened child in the dark, calling for its mother." So much did he say as if in jest; but then there came an earnest ring in his voice.

"My worthy friend, I can bear this loneliness no longer. It is frightful, and has quite unmanned me. I must see my wife at once. She will come, if they have to carry her, when once she knows my state."

The chaplain let paper and pen drop from his hand. He repeated what had been his hope and expectation, and, as if it were necessary to remind the wretched man of the morrow, that his time was now become of awful moment to him, he was about to take the sacrament for the last time. Let it be with a lightened conscience.

Coleman interrupted him once and again. He must see his wife, if she could possibly come. "After I shall have seen her," he said, "I shall be bet-

ter able, my good friend, to hear and feel what you say."

The chaplain was disappointed. He expressed strong doubts that the prisoner's wife would be allowed an interview at such an irregular hour, and urgently impressed upon him that the tendency of such a meeting could only be to divert his mind from the solemn subjects which should engross him. If he were wise, the prisoner should wait till the evening, when he would be permitted to take farewell of his family.

"I want no harrowing farewell this morning," said poor Coleman; "I merely want her company for a while, and *not for the last time.* Obtain this mercy for me, Mr. ———; let me be refreshed and relieved if it be but for a few minutes, and she will come again to-night."

Mr. ——— could not refuse. The entreaty was put to him with a subdued piteousness which moved him and cut short his protestations. He went away, promising that Mrs. Coleman should immediately be made acquainted with the prisoner's desire, and, if it were possible that she could come, he promised himself to accompany her to the gate.

When he was gone, Coleman already began to watch and listen for her coming. He waited for her with a woman's longing. Could sunshine ever pierce through that yellow world of rain without? Could any cheer ever reach him again in his condemned cell?

About eight o'clock—that is to say, after two hours' impatient vigil, his breakfast was brought to him, mended with those little prison luxuries allowed to the condemned. The indulgence has something revolting in it. Here was hot coffee, eggs, and toast conceded as a measure of mercy to a poor trembling soul coming up on the morrow for eternal judgment.

Coleman left the meal untasted; the damp horror of the night he had passed hung around him still. He wished for nothing but the coming of her who was all the world to him, that she might dissolve this squalid spell from his mind.

About nine o'clock she came, and stood unsupported at the door of his cell.

He met her midway, and he caught her in his arms as if he never meant to unloosen his clasp. They sat down on his bed, and he told her what days and nights he had spent, with a feverish eagerness which gave her a secret shock —it was so unlike his old calm ways. When he had finished, he listened like a child to what she had to say. She sat looking at him, holding both his hands, and she seemed about to speak, but, fearful to trust her voice, at last she said steadily, "So they told you about your mother, Will?"

"Nell, Nell," he replied, "all that has happened since you and I parted last. Yes, I know the worst; all I can hope for on earth is this quiet hour with you."

Again she sat looking at him, as if waiting till some strong feeling within her would let her speak. Be sure when she does speak it will be some comfortable words.

"Will," she faltered, "I am come to tell you your mother is not dead."

He started to his feet, thought a moment before he gave loose to his feelings, and then sat quietly down again.

"Ah! Nell, you go too far now; you would do much to lighten my heart, but you ought not. For God's sake, Nell!" he burst out—"I can't read your face. You could not smile, surely, if this were not true."

She was smiling into his haggard eyes.

"I dare not deceive you, Will; I am not so shortsighted. Your mother is living, and likely to recover."

"I thank my good and merciful God! Now I seem to feel that I can part this world in peace. You came with the good news, my girl. I'll trust you for that, when there is good news to be had."

He sat realizing what he had heard, grappling with it lest it should escape him, and she did not interrupt him for many minutes; but she said to herself in thought, "He thinks I could smile if he were not saved."

"Willie," she said, in a fresh, glad tone, "I often remember awakening you at night from an uneasy struggling sleep with my hand on your shoulder so, and we both laughed together at your goblin visions. This time, darling, we won't laugh nor shed any tears when I waken you from this dreadful sleep, but we'll thank God together."

She put her hand on his shoulde and looked up at him. In a second

bright eyes melted, and she cried out with a sob, "My darling, awake. You are not to die—you are reprieved!"

It was not the manner in which she meant to end, but she was weak and worn out; the pent hurricane of joy swept her along.

"Your mother can never be tried again, and she has confessed the crime which she committed, I am sure under insanity; *I am convinced of that*"—all this and the following in sobbing fragments as she lay on his breast. "Her confession was sent to the secretary of state, and the governor, who has proved a kind friend to me, received the reprieve this morning, and at my entreaty allowed me to be the first bearer of the news. Here he is coming to tell you it himself. Oh, Will! did you not know you were killing me when you sacrificed yourself? but you see God has given you back to me."

Before Coleman could believe in this wakening the governor entered, and confirmed Eleanor's statement by the official communication of his release.

Coleman was restored to life and freedom again—a freedom which to him was like the blaze of daylight on one buried alive.

When he and his wife left the prison gates there was a cab in waiting for them, and in the ferment of popular feeling which existed in the town, it was thought needful to have some police in attendance to prevent the possibility of any violence being offered to the prisoner. A city mob had gathered without, drawn thither by the rumor that a reprieve had arrived. It must be understood they were in ignorance of the grounds upon which it was granted, and believed Coleman to be guilty; they were, therefore, sulky at the disappointment they were to sustain, and felt some brutal sense of wrong sustained in being thus cheated of the popular spectacle which had been promised to them on the morrow. On Coleman's appearance, therefore, outside the walls, there arose against him a storm of groans and hootings, and this was his welcome upon the rainy street.

He crossed to the cab quickly, less troubled for himself than for his wife, who might be frightened by the threatening demonstration. But he need not have feared for her. She walked at his side without her veil, evenly sharing with him his shame. She proved her words that morning when she said she would be prouder to share his shame than half a throne.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The cloud upon Coleman's name soon cleared away as the facts became generally known, and there arose a general chorus of sympathy and respect in all the papers of the day, which continued while ever the strange events of the tragedy retained a hold on the public mind, a period not exceeding a few weeks. The matchless wife also had her share of the praise, but they knew nothing of her, not as I know her and her husband knows her. This moment her voice seems to be sounding in my ears—the soft low Somersetshire accent formed to coax or comfort, or, haply, to mourn.

Immediately after the foregoing events, Mr. Coleman removed his mother, wife, and child to a quiet country lodging, and there they lived out of sight. Broken in mind and constitution, the wretched old lady did not long survive her disgrace; the effects of the poison she had taken, and the violent remedies employed, gave a shock to her vital powers, and, having maundered through a few months' life, tenderly nursed and cherished by her son and Eleanor, she died one night painlessly, with a dim knowledge of who stood by her bedside, but giving no token of either hope or fear; and thus the millstone dropped from Coleman's neck.

When the funeral had taken place, Coleman removed his family to the neighborhood of Brighton, where they at present reside. Years have passed since, and Coleman has put the heavy trial of his mother's heathen death over him, and he has grown to believe—as we all grow to believe, our faith warping slowly to our desire—that a merciful God has pardoned her great crime, and that he may meet her again, purged of her blood-stains. With a fond perversion of context, he has set a Scripture legend upon her tomb-stone, and he, and Eleanor, and his son, in the course of years, have grown to trust its promise.

SACRED
TO MY MOTHER,
MARTHA COLEMAN,
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE
AGED 64.

"Though your sins be as scarlet, yet shall they be white as snow; though they be like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Eleanor, that subtle sophist, at first taught him to believe that the poor old suicide was deranged by much sorrow and oppression when she committed her last crime; and then gradually reasoning back by gentle links, she led him to think in a loose, a happy, and unreasoning way, that the first dreadful crime was under the influence of mania also.

She reminded him how simple, how generous, how foldless had been the old woman's character before her marriage, and how there was every evidence of growing disease in her look, demeanor, and address when she began to sink under her wrongs. She reminded him artfully how he had told her that his great grandfather had been deranged for many years of his declining life, and that the second generation is generally affected by hereditary disease.

How she watched him, and soothed him, and guarded him from pain without permitting him to see her tactics! Silently, undemonstratively bright, like starlight, her love dwelt with him and about him: conversing and reading, laughing and playing pleasant old tunes on the cottage piano, such as his soul loved, she enchanted the days, still soothing him if fretted, and by'r Lady!—not to make too solemn a business of it—often chaffing him out of his grievances without mercy.

To this day Johnnie is still coddled somewhat injudiciously, and has more medicine than is good for him, but his constitution is able to resist such ravages, and he is grown a fine healthy boy. Michael lives with them, and will die with them. At Eleanor's persuasion he has taken the pledge, from which event it was generally observed that his racy wisdom declined in body, and his whim lost its salt; his long nose became very blue; Ichabod is writren on its bleak ridge; but his affection for Eleanor still survives, notwithstanding her cruel exaction. His wheedling patronage flickers up now and then amid his convivial ruins, and his native humor fitfully triumphs over lemonade. I have some hopes Jamaica rum will yet solace his old age. Coleman makes much of him, and holds his devoted fidelity toward Eleanor during the time of danger and sorrow in affectionate remembrance. Michael's little granddaughter is supported by him—at a distance, for he is afraid of growing fond of her, as he surely will at last. She is being educated in a school at Wells, and wears a gay uniform, consisting of a red petticoat and little French cap; she is remarkable for two things—a marvelous appetite and great quickness at her lessons.

Hill Side was sold, and the proceeds have since enabled Coleman to live in secure independence. They live in a pretty retired villa outside Brighton, and near the coast, where those treacherous chalk cliffs are crumbling away, and the sea gaining on us through the centuries. As I passed by one summer evening I saw the husband and wife sitting beside a young larchwood; they seemed alone in the world of sunshine, and in complete content. They were watching the red sun poise upon the hill, like a glorious ark upon Ararat; and sleeping in the emerald flood of light lay the clouds, like fossil megatherions—a solemn Old-world dream of peace.

THE END.